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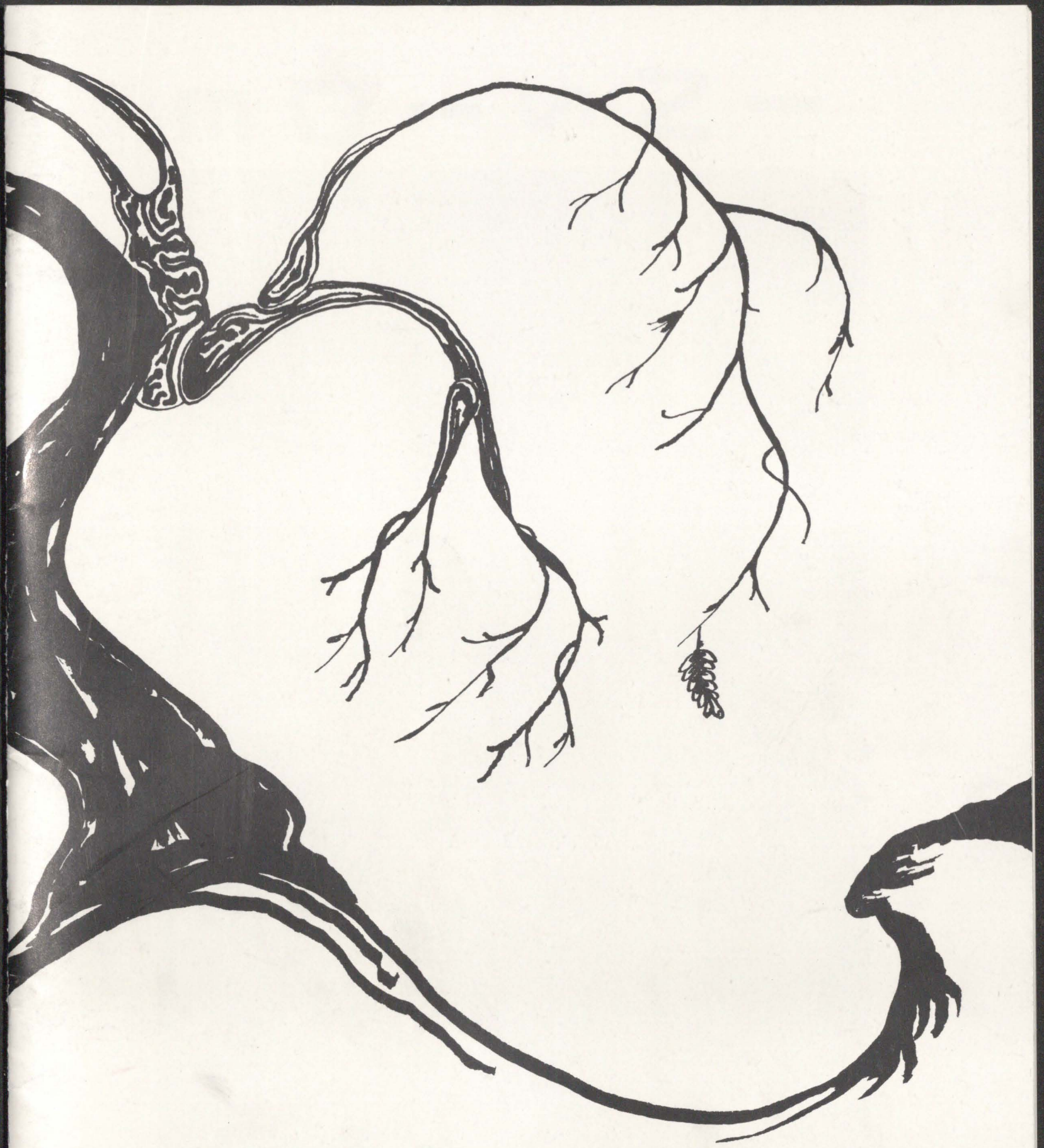
Wright State University Community



NEXUS

BLUE OBOE

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NEXUS

1984-85

Mustered Out

The photograph lies about his age—
World War II army fatigues baggie
around the legs, a B-25 poking
its nose from a hangar behind him.
The German Shepherd licks his hand
for salt and company
my father, squinting at the camera
ashen light waxing his shoes
shoulder bones like an iron fence
the sky is a grey overcoat
with clouds bulging at the seams.

The bedroom clock dusty with boredom
its dull heartbeat in my ear
his tie hangs like a noodle above
the briefcase with rusted locks
for teeth. Spare change stacked
in columns on the desk, its drawers
filled with my fifth grade sketches—
magic butterflies and talking dogs.
Outside he pulls weeds with spotted
hands from patio cracks; his thoughts
are dry wood splintering in the wind.

Ernie's Pyramid Room Diner

All the regulars are there
assembled like hungry pigeons
at wobbly tables with chipped
formica tops, walls papered
in Dick Tracy cartoon strips
plastic chair cushions torn
like gaping mouths full of cotton
stuffing held by peeling yellow tape
the ching-ching from an old
cash register with faded numbers
steam from the grill rising
in tendrils of gray hair.
Conversations are disturbed by coffee
cups clinking to fit their saucers
when morning scrubs the window
Orioles drift from telephone wires
like pieces of dark confetti
bird songs unfold from Spring's flute.

For Mac

I.

At two a.m. heat lightning
bares a clean row of teeth
that sink into blackberry sky
its sweet darkness dripping
through my windowsill like jelly
running down edges of toast.
A flurry of fireflies crowd
the t.v. screen, air filled
with night-blooming jasmine.
You dream of old keys jangling
the locks of a Missouri home
lawn manicured and stiff under
baseballs and plastic kiddie pools—
your arms fill with moon.

II.

April scattered flecks of mud
over the basement window
brown smudges of sun throwing
spots of light on cardboard boxes
labeled with magic-marker dates
1964: grade school report cards
wrinkled mittens, a plastic baseball
bat and the yellow photograph you forgot—
Elizabeth, adopted mother standing
by a fat Christmas tree
last smile for the camera.
The memory is here like a mushroom
popping up after Spring rains
her jasmine hair fills the basement,
now a blanket of moon light.

III.

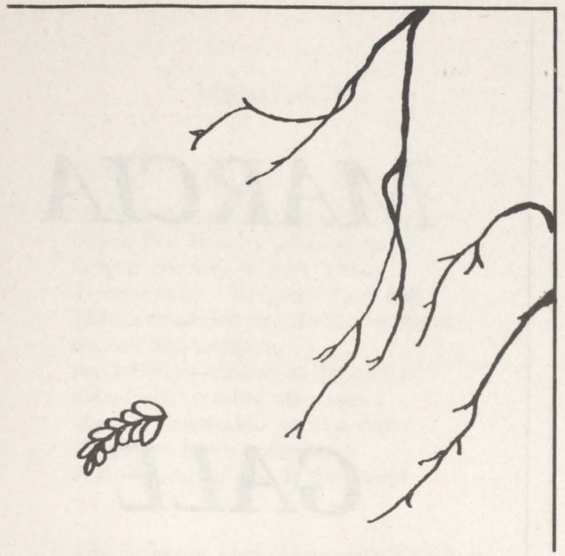
Coffee clouds our porous mugs
Missouri 800 miles behind
rain patters tiny feet
on the drum of our roof.
Grey thread of morning mends
a torn sky drifting north
our fingers meet across the distance
of old voices boxed for storage.
Your face, clear as the moon
unwinds a smile
leaving orchids in my hand.

MARCIA

GALE

KESTER

Marcia Gale Kester *was the winner of the 1983 Gold Coast Arts Award in poetry. She has been published in over seventy poetry magazines nationwide. She has a B.F.A. in Creative Writing from Stephens College in Missouri. She lives in Pompano Beach, Florida.*



One Leaf

by Rocco Lo Bosco

The couple practically rubbed elbows across the tiny cafe table. They were seated near a large window that looked out on a busy Manhattan street. Each table had a little vase of plastic flowers and he had taken theirs and placed it on the floor near his feet.

Most people might have guessed they were brother and sister—both had intense, deep set brown eyes, prominent noses and dark skin. He wore an oversized t-shirt with brown pants and sneakers. She was dressed in a gray tweed skirt and a brown blouse. She chain smoked, drank her black coffee in slurps and pushed her glasses up on her nose when she wasn't wiping it with a soggy Kleenex. He sat up very straight, gripping the sides of his chair tightly as if he feared it might take off at any moment. He kept glancing out on the street.

"This is a bad spring," he said. "Too cold. Too wet."

She looked out the window. "Ah, it's not that bad. Today's been pretty good."

"Well, I'm thinking of yesterday. Yesterday it rained all damn day. Lisa kept asking me if it was still night out."

She hunched over her coffee cup and nodded. "So, Sali, are you gonna tell me what's bugging you or what?"

"Your cold is bugging me, Beca. Your damn nose running all over the place is truly disgusting. I can feel your slimy germs marching right across the table. And I don't need a cold right now."

"OK, you're not going to tell me. Fine."

"Nothing's wrong. Honest. I'm OK."

"Will you stop looking out the window, you make me nervous! Why the hell do you keep looking out the window for?"

He shrugged. "I'm looking for Jesus. I wanna buy him a cup of coffee."

Beca flapped a hand at him and took a drag on her cigarette. For a few moments they sat silently, he tapping his foot rapidly, she glancing around the cafe.

He gently fingered her elbow. "So what'cha reading these days. Still with Jane Austen?"

She blew some smoke into his face and mugged. "That's right, wise guy—Austen and Eliot and Dickens. They've got a lot to offer . . . I think I know what's got you. It's Daddy, right?"

"God, Bec, you are persistent. It's not Daddy, it's the cockroach I killed last night. No really, I'm not kidding. This huge, egg-laden roach was climbing our bedroom drapes last night while Tess and I were doing *guess what*. So I ran for the **Raid** and blitzed her, and she nose dived behind the dresser. I assumed she was dead. But a minute later the tenacious little bastard was struggling up the drapes again. So I mashed her in some toilet paper and tossed her into the bowl. Much later I went into the bathroom and do you know what I found? That poor mangled insect was trying to swim to the side of the bowl! She was still alive! It scared the hell out of me for a second and then I felt disgusted. I flushed the toilet, but when she went down the chute I started feeling guilty as hell. You know why?"

Beca laughed and snuffed out her cigarette. "Sure. Because she fought a lot harder to survive than you would have under comparable circumstances. And she was only an insect."

Sali's mouth fell open in a wide grin. He grinned somewhat like a blind man, with a certain goofy beauty. "See, Bec, that's why I like talking to you. I've liked talking to you ever since you were born. You *understand!*"

Beca squinted at him through her glasses.

"Come on, Bec, don't worry about me, I'm fine. What's bothering me is what has always bothered me. I met you for lunch, not therapy."

Finally freeing his right hand from the chair seat, he took one of his sister's cigarettes. He sat up very straight and blew great plumes of smoke into the air as if he were doing a difficult trick and perhaps expected surrounding patrons to break out into gales of applause at any moment.

"You're corny," she said, laughing. "Where'd you get that shirt? It's horrible."

"I found it at the laundermat. It was in the clean-claim box."

She laughed again. "You just bought a house and you took a shirt from the laundermat?"

"I prefer clothes acquired at the laundermat. There's a certain mystery in wearing them, if you know what I mean. But now that Tess and I have a washer and dryer in our new home, I guess that's one affectation I'll have to give up, along with the idea of ever quitting my goddamn job. You know—"

"Have you called Mommy and Daddy?" she asked suddenly.

"God, Beca, not in the last few days. These calls to Florida are—"

"I spoke to Mommy yesterday."

"What'd she say?"

"The same stuff, only a little worse. Daddy lays up in bed all day watching that tiny black and white. That bothers me more than anything else. The idea of him *trapped* inside that little box. He doesn't even come down to eat anymore. It's been a month since that stupid T.V. has been shut off!" The corners of her mouth trembled as she finished speaking.

"Well, what *would* you expect him to do while he's dying? Read Thomas Hardy? He's always watched a lot of television."

She violently squashed her cigarette in the ashtray and signaled the waiter for more coffee. "Jesus, Beca," he said, "I meet you for lunch and you have a tiny salad, a gallon of coffee and a pack of cigarettes. Keep it up and you'll get there before Daddy does!"

"I guess he watched a lot of T.V. when he stayed with you last month," she said, her voice dropping away.

"Eat, sleep, T.V. and suffer courageously." He took a deep breath, letting it go in a long sigh. "Did I tell you we went to his father's grave?"

"Yeah, but you were vague on the details."

"What details are there to visiting a goddamn grave? We got lost looking for it, and I felt strange to be with my dying stepfather looking for his father's grave . . . I never met his father and I don't even know where ours is . . . We looked for that grave for a half hour in a vicious spring wind. This spring has been the pits," he said, his eyes drifting out to the street.

> " 'Did you know about the Law of Appreciation As Applied to the Deceased And Other—' "

"Plastic flowers, loads of plastic flowers at the cemetery . . ." His voice had grown distant. "I hate plastic flowers."

"Who finally found the grave?"

"I did," he answered, suddenly brisk. "Dad was too busy coughing his brains out. There were some other people lost too. An old couple walking back and forth among the graves. Lisa ran around the place like it was a new playground. We had to take her because I couldn't get a sitter. You know what she asked me? If she was stepping on the dead people's heads."

"That kid's a corker," Beca said.

"All in all it was a mess with Daddy coughing and coughing, the old people looking for a grave and Lisa running around like a maniac. Then it started to drizzle. That gave me an idea for a new career."

"The rain?"

"Not the rain—Lisa asking me for an umbrella. That in combination with everything else." Now he folded his hands and sat up even straighter. "For my next job I will patrol cemeteries with an umbrella, using it to protect the old people against the wind and rain as they seek the graves of their loved ones. Special discounts when they're looking for a kid's grave."

Beca sneezed into a fresh Kleenex. "Jeez, Sali, I just can't believe he's dying," she said, wiping her nose.

He widened his eyes. "It'll probably be more real a few weeks after he's dead. Just about that time he'll start growing in value to his loved ones. Did you know about The Law of Appreciation As Applied To The Deceased And Other—"

"Lookit, Sali," she said, narrowing her eyes, "I'm in

no mood for your goddamn cynical remarks that do a crummy job of hiding your hurt. So spare me, OK?"

"OK, OK. Take it easy." After a long pause he said, "Dad and I missed each other by a lot . . . There could have been more . . ."

"I've got the same problem, Sali."

They both fell silent again, she looking into her cup, he staring out into the street. Finally, she said, "And how's the job?"

"Ah! The Job!" He spread his hands expansively. "The Job! I am the red helium balloon pursued by my boss the porcupine. I am the lunatic my company needs to survive with a sense of humanity. I am the tree, the rooftop and the star. Sometimes I still dream of picking up with Tess and Lisa and running away to Texas as a New-wave Depression Nomad, like our cousin Mitchell."

"Is that what he's calling himself these days? He's still one of the unhappiest bastards I know."

"OK, then how about starting a colony on Mars? Maybe I could hook up with that guy your boss is gonna fire, the alien hunter."

"You two wouldn't get along. He'd spot you for an alien."

"OK then, how about changing the subject. You want to hear something amazing? Though I am thirty-two years old, it's only this spring I've noticed how the leaves turn greener as the season progresses. No, I'm serious. They become a darker and deeper green as they mature. I've always known that in a distant sort of way, but this year I've actually *noticed* the color changing. Thirty-two years to realize how it goes with a leaf. Unbelievable, isn't it? At first I felt like grabbing people on the street and telling them."

She sighed and lit another cigarette. He looked at her and curled his lip. "Yuk," he said.

"Yeah, I know," she said. "Maybe I should start drinking my cigarettes and smoking my coffee. But tell me, why do I now feel like asking you if you're ever going to finish your Masters?"

He raised his hand abruptly, flat palm towards her. "Please don't. Hey, did you know I won a barbeque grill?" he asked suddenly. "At work! A gas driven-job!"

A couple at a nearby table turned to stare and he waved at them. Beca put her hands to her face for a moment. "God, Sali! You're embarrassing!"

"Hey, we're talking big stuff," he said. "Double range, electric spark-start, self-cleaning grill! And you ask me if I'm going back to school? I don't need school anymore, I've got a Magic-Glow Barbeque unit now!"

"How'd you win it?" she asked, giggling.

"At the ten-year company dinner. I even wore my ten-year pin for the occasion. They had a raffle for two gas Barbeques. Herman Lindsey won one too and everyone got a free telephone besides. Frank Halpern was so happy for me; he said the Barbeque was perfect for my new house. It's a Magic-Glow but it's hardly magical. It weighs over eighty pounds and has to be assembled. And from the looks of the assembly instructions it's probably as easy to assemble as an aircraft carrier. You've got to use these special little rocks with it if you want your food to taste charcoal cooked. It's everything that's wrong with America and it's all mine. And I've got an extra telephone now. I'll call you up and invite you to a cookout."

"How was the ten-year thing?" Beca asked.

"Not as bad after I was drunk than before. Fifty people I've worked around for ten years, I hardly know any of them. We all sat in this huge, badly lighted room with ugly orange drapes. We ate catered food in Lilliputian portions. We drank fantastic quantities of booze. We said a lot of things we didn't mean. I tell you, Bec, I wanna go to Mars. Mars! No trees on Mars to remind you of how much you don't notice. And no people on Mars to remind you of how much you do. Bill Sabitini got so drunk his skin turned yellow as cheese and he passed out. Poor bastard, he belongs on Mars and doesn't know it. Then they had the raffle, but I was talking to Ellen McCormick and I didn't hear my name called. Somebody tapped me on the shoulder and pointed and I turned around and here comes Herman Lindsey pushing this monstrous box across the floor, coming at me like a runaway truck! And I tell you, Bec, *that moment of contact*—seeing Herman with that stupid drunken smile on his face and that box roaring across the floor—just depressed the hell out of me. And to make matters worse everyone applauded like winning it was something I intended."

Beca sat listening and smoking and wiping her nose. "God, Sali, you make it sound so terrible. The Barbeque grill might come in handy. Maybe it's a good omen."

"Is it? When I took it home Tess and I had a fight about it."

"Why?"

"Because she didn't laugh when I hauled the damn thing up the stairs. I nearly needed a goddamn crane, the box was so heavy. And Tess took it so seriously. She ooed and ahhed and walked circles around it, fitting it neatly into our future. I got mad and gave her my righteous speech on American greed and overconsumption which she promptly ruined by asking me why I sounded so enthusiastic about it when I called her on the phone. I was drunk, that's why."

"You took it as seriously as Tess," Beca said, "in a different way."

"Yeah, that's true, isn't it?"

"Have you made up with her yet?"

"Oh sure. She started to assemble it already. I swore I wouldn't help her. But now maybe I will."

They both looked out the window. "Maybe the weather will improve soon," he said.

A solitary leaf glided down the sidewalk and both of them followed it as it skittered past the window and out of sight. Their eyes met and she chuckled softly. "Well, where the hell did that come from?" she said. "There's not a tree on the block."

"A beautiful little leaf," he murmured.

She looked at him and smiled. He leaned across the table and kissed her on the forehead.

He was smiling when he carefully placed the plastic flowers back on the table and rose to pay the check. Once outside he embraced his sister very tightly before saying goodbye.

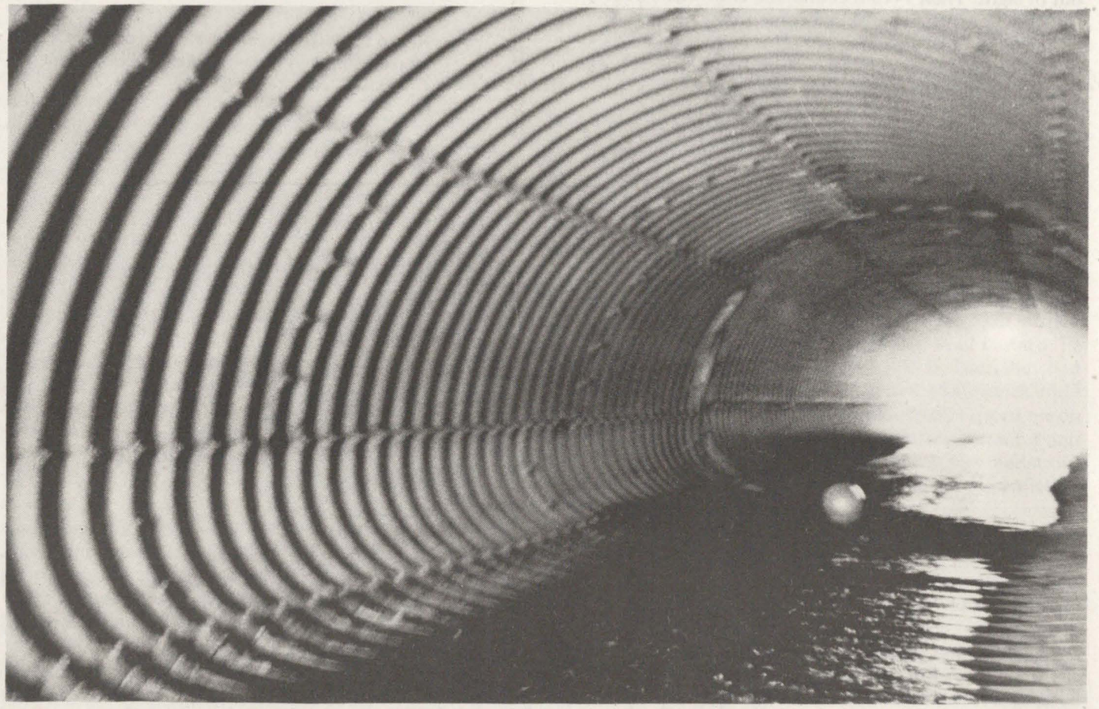
Rocco Lo Bosco *recently published a collection of his poetry titled "A Distance of Knives." He lives in Lindenhurst, New York.*

Changing Colors

Pry open this can gently
This paint has been sealed so long
That lid and container are one.
Solid metal with spots of rust,
And yet
The rim around the lid
Gives promise of an opening
So pry gently until it gives way.

Stir gently this thick paint
Sanguine drops of color shock its substance.
So long the beige has been constant
That change is first resisted,
And yet
With wooden strokes so smooth
It blends into a vivid red
That once again has purpose.

Wendy Larish



The width is an abnormal condition

Todd A. Fry

The footprints to the water
the blue sky enveloped in fire
in the air
the day the day departs
to become the magic
of the earth
in the air

by the backward embrace
all motion pivots
amplifying traces
of the infinite

other
sequences overlap, undulate
and vanish
at the inevitable squeak
of the white horse
rhythmic to its shadow

while the chair is still rocking
the cigarette unlit
(these lungs are not mine)

this soul is not mine
idly distorted
idly distracted by the tides
from which the eyes unopened
return into this again

as if something
some form, some digression
some overture is being made to
appease some digression

in this damnable intricacy
becoming, always becoming
this again
and then
this again.

Celestial Motions

Jupiter moves across the sky above
three ceilings, plastered
and pink with insulation.
The stone roof runs with water
wrung from the belly of black clouds
while the Sun slides south for morning.

My night confuses me. Its
heliacal risings are as ordered
as Antares' arrival in the east,
but I can't fathom the geometry.
If my cells mirror the celestial movements
then how far the space between my sun and soul?
I am, of course, gauging relative distances.

Here, in the dream of my people, trees
touch the edges of the earth's core.
I confine myself to the smaller spaces,
observing the language of crickets and cats
and rain slapping at moss outside my door.

Ohio Spring

The magnolias have frozen, brown-fisted buds
and snow blinks on top of mole burrows
against the red barn door.

That is north. West of here are two women.
One sits beneath a sullen volcano
watching marigolds fill with beetles.
She sniffs the air for salt while
somewhere inside Idaho the other
runs the waters of Sri Lanka through her fingers.

That is west and the wind is sharp today.
Here there are trees ripe with swallows
in the pasture. Beak down,
breast to the cold,
they hurtle up as one great bird
to dim the sunspit crystals
on the silo's floor.

Kate Hauck

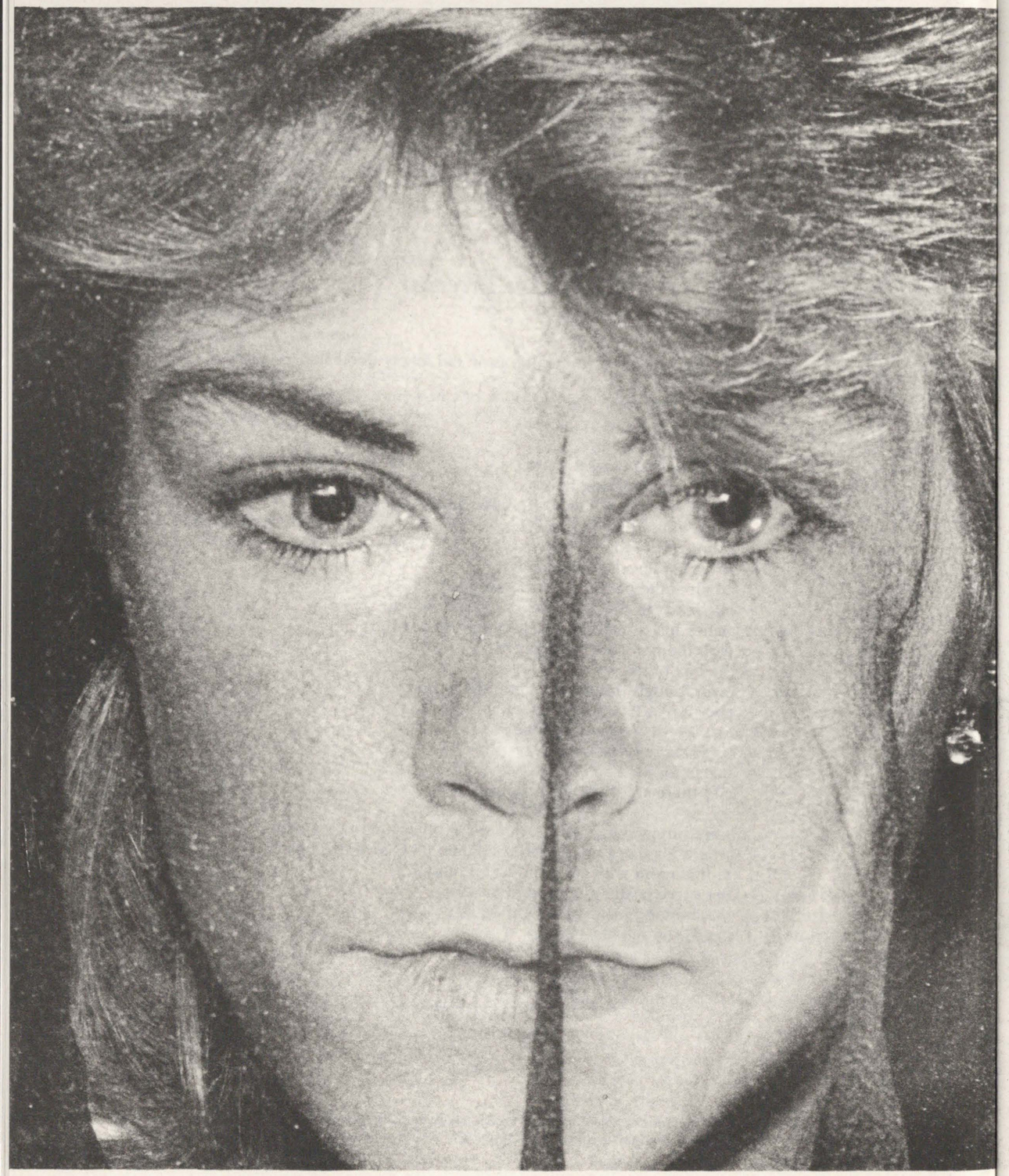
Bedroom Interior

This man is neat, is sentimental, is an old lonely doctor of a man.

He has not lost much this time.
He pretends to be in a hospital,
pretends he is not.
He thinks he has worked hard
and is still working hard.
This man who is small and crumpled and moving
in on himself
is not confused.
He hangs his towels neatly and
admires the pattern of rust sprinkled
like ink over the iron bars of his cotted bed.
He latches his cupboards when he has finished
with the book of photographs,
the box of tissues—
even though these things are hell to find
and the latches are tricky.
He does all this without thinking.
On his bureau are a series of brushes:
one is for his hair
and there are three for his suits.

He is tired now and does not notice the oily stain on the door
where his hand has rested each time he passes through
to this room with the untouched candle,
the curve of the mirror, and muted,
the motion of the man slipping soundly
inside his age-old tremor.

Kate Hauck *is a tutor in the WSU Writing Lab, the associate editor of* **Nexus**, *and a senior communications major at Wright State. She lives in Yellow Springs, Ohio.*



NANCY

by Rick Roush

The bus bucked to a stop two blocks ahead, its mechanical doors crumbling open to admit women toting boxes and bags. From the open window Nancy watched businessmen as they exited gray, monolithic buildings on their way to lunch. She imagined she recognized one of the men. His lips were pressed together firmly in determination, as if to resist a criticism of his business proposal in a meeting. She remembered that firmness in a boy she'd once known, a regular classmate of hers in college. He'd once said he'd make a fortune one day, and then clamped his lips together as if daring anyone to question his resolution. Then, Nancy had never questioned it.

The man she thought she recognized walked by, his figure interrupted by a tree which had been planted in the concrete between him and her sight. Imagining the man's strong, purposeful strides, Nancy closed the window. The fumes of the idling bus gagged her. She listened for the familiar whoosh of the air brakes releasing and steadied herself for the labored lurch of acceleration.

Nancy had become accustomed to riding the bus, just as she had accustomed herself to her husband's firm-lipped authority. The Chevy that sat mutely in their driveway seemed a symbol of Erick's firmness. It would remain a dead issue until he could find time to look at it. The car was a minor problem; he accepted it passively, just as he had accepted Nancy's argument that she needed the sense of independence a car could offer. She felt he'd never find the time to fix it.

The bus was heading east, toward the shopping centers. Erick needed some new t-shirts. She'd noticed this need a week ago when Erick had forgotten his deodorant. He had pulled to his armpits the limp sleeves of a freshly laundered t-shirt and rolled on the deodorant, letting the sleeves sag back into some semblance of shape. But Erick never complained about his aging clothes, the worn heels of his shoes, the fraying collars of his work shirts, though he used to, before his resolution to make a fortune broke. It used to matter.

When it had mattered, she had tried to be a good wife for him. She'd never questioned his beliefs that wives were supposed to clean the smudges left by children, fix favorite meals, keep the house in shape, and enjoy the husband's favorite positions in bed. But the kids were gone now. There were no more child-sized fingerprints on the refrigerator, no more need to encourage them to eat their oatmeal using the excuse that people in China were starving. That tact had never worked. They'd wisecracked that the only things in China that might be tempted to eat oatmeal were the horses. Erick had sided with them in their laughter, and Nancy had always later scraped the remains of congealing horsefood from the bowls into the garbage.

Now Erick didn't seem to care about meals, or clothes, or favorite positions in bed. On his weak nights, which were as infrequent as his strong, forty seconds of gasping effort ended the creaking bed

springs. This morning it had taken thirty-nine, and Erick, after pulling air into his lungs, had collapsed into Nancy's pliable body. He had lain there a couple of minutes, shrunken and sweating, suffocating Nancy with his weight. She remembered how the light had spread around his bulky body as he had waddled into the bathroom afterwards. The hair had been matted on his beefy back, growing from shoulder to shoulder as if smothering his whiteness in black tentacles.

Maybe she used to be a good wife. Maybe she had grown out of practice and Erick had reciprocated through his apathy. She continued to respect the sanctity of the marriage, though its promise remained unfulfilled. Perhaps the promise was just a young girl's fantasy. Middle age shattered the fantasy. Life with Erick, his firmness promising deeds that his skill couldn't execute, showered her with an inescapable reality. Reality was nights of television and quiet distance. Erick seldom spoke to her about anything, and when he did speak, it was to voice a criticism about one of his supervisors. Nancy didn't know how to respond to his bitter confidences without bringing up the powerlessness of his position at the factory. At such times she sought the senseless solitude that television induced, staring blankly at the screen, waiting for Erick to finish his oaths.

The bus lurched to another stop. Faces rose and hovered above the driver as practiced fingers slid coins or transfer stubs into the register slot. Necks unbent from the task and tired eyes scanned the bus for empty seats. Nancy peered into the faces that swayed from side to side as the bus pulled away. The swaying entranced her. She saw the people but did not realize their existence.

"Thanks for making a space, dear," said the old lady who plopped down beside Nancy. "I think my feet would've given out if I had to do any more standin'."

The old lady's wispy gray hair fell limply from under a banded felt hat that sprouted plastic sprigs from either side. Buoyant in lower lids that drooped to rouge-smeared jowls, her round eyes pried politely. She clasped a crinkling brown shopping bag close to her breasts as she leaned toward Nancy.

"I couldn't get out last week when they were on sale," she said. Her breath was chalky, like medicine that buffers stomach acid.

"Oh," Nancy said.

"They're slippers," the old lady stated bluntly as she held the bag open for Nancy's inspection. "I found some nice pink ones. Had to make sure they had enough stretch to hide my arthritic toes. The pain kept me from getting out to the sale last month."

Nancy nodded and smiled at the old woman, and then glanced past her to a man whose arm hung from the overhead support bar. He seemed to assure her that escape was possible, if not at this stop, then at the next. That man too reminded her of the self-assured firmness of the boy she had once known in college.

She turned back to the window in time to see a vocational school fall away in the haze of the city. The slipper woman talked, saying the same things Nancy remembered her own mother talking about when trying to be friendly to people she didn't know—little things, insignificant things. The old woman's voice was soothing though. It was familiar. It was friendly.

"Everything's for the best, though," Nancy heard the old woman say.

"It may be," Nancy conceded.

"I guess I could have made my old blue ones squeak out a few more miles, but it's such a little thing."

Wasn't it bad, Nancy thought, to force all the good out of a thing, to use it until it could give little more pleasure? Wouldn't it be worthless then? She looked into the old woman's face. The haggardness showed wear but still a trace of undeterred smile.

"What size do you wear, dear?" asked the old lady.

"Normally a size six, a half size smaller in tennis shoes."

"You shouldn't wear'em too tight. Buy'em to fit, not constrict is what I always say. Harry never used to listen to me sayin' it, though. He didn't mind squeezin' my big feet into shoes that didn't fit. He made me wear extra tight shoes when he was alive. He said he was embarrassed to go out anywhere with me and have people starin' at us because of my big feet. It was funny, though. People still stared. I couldn't ever stand straight in those tight shoes. Kept wobblin' around."

Nancy chuckled, turning to her window in time to catch a billboard on the side of a dirty brick building that advertised a new Buick Regal for three hundred dollars off base price. She thought of how nice it would be to go grocery shopping or to the laundromat in a new Regal. Erick would never have the money to afford it.

Nancy no longer noticed the regularity of the lurching bus as it made its scheduled stops, nor that the old lady had left her side. Other thoughts pushed into her head. She remembered her husband entertaining friends from work long ago. They were loud, playing poker while the kids sat around the living room trying to hear the television, Len and Rick punching each other playfully, giggling as Tracy looked dreamily at a cowboy character grinning graciously at a blushing lady. The voices from the kitchen were bawdy, contrasting the implications of the actor's grin.

"And she asks me, 'How long does it usually take you to get into a strange lady's panties?' " Nancy remembered hearing her husband retelling a bad joke.

"How strange?" croaked one of the poker players.

"No, no," Erick had answered with little patience. "I answered, 'Well, I've never actually *counted* the seconds'. Get it?"

Nancy had given a short laugh as she had set the snacks down in an open space on the table. Even then she counted the seconds. Erick had stared her back into the kitchen.

There was a sad humor in the joke. After the glow had worn off their marriage, Erick's rough hands mauling at Nancy's breasts always meant forty seconds of huffing and puffing to follow. Sex was his routine. Her involvement was pointless. The seconds passed too slowly for her, and she seemed always stuck with counting them.

The phone was ringing when Nancy got home from shopping, but it had stopped before she could set down her sacks. It seldom rang during the day, though Erick would get an occasional call at night from friends at work. Nancy had few friends. It didn't matter how long she lived in a town. She didn't feel she had anything left to give after giving so long to her children and, exclusively for the last four to five years, to her husband. She felt like laughing with someone. Sometimes she saw her next door neighbor, a slim woman who seemed to Nancy harried yet skilled in staying one step ahead of hopelessness. She thought about making friends with her and had often called out friendly hello's which were answered with waves and hurried explanations of duties needing her immediate attention. Nancy wasn't sure her neighbor was really so busy or whether the excuse was given to avoid her. She continued trying to slow her down with empty pleasantries. "How's Mr. Johnson?" she'd ask, emphasizing the gender title. She'd never learned the husband's first name. The standard reply was usually, "Too busy to get sick," or "Too busy to notice or to give a damn." Nancy felt it was those responses that could draw her and Iris together; the sympathy arising from a common pain could join them in commiseration of their circumstances. Nancy could dig beneath the duty of surface communications to expose her loneliness to the neighbor. But Iris just as she gave her standard replies always seemed to be getting into her car to leave or entering her front door. Nancy accepted her failure to befriend Iris, her heart determining that friendship ought not be built on common recriminations and angry gossip. Iris' shrugging shoulders and downturned mouth spoke of a resignation that she would bear alone just as Nancy bore her own dissatisfactions. The privacy of pain meant more than its sharing.

Tearing at the plastic wrapping of the new t-shirts, Nancy cursed the privacy of her pain. She wanted to hint to Iris about the desperateness of her own existence just as she thought Iris hinted about her desperateness. The desperateness was a product of her loneliness. The loneliness seemed even more pervasive when Erick was home. He was present but inattentive, hiding behind first the morning and then the evening newspapers each night after a solemn dinner in which his only remarks were perfunctory and between bites: "How's your day?" and, before she could answer, "Pass the salt." Nancy wondered if loneliness were the origin of Iris' desperateness.

She replaced the old t-shirts with the new, stuffing the well-worn shirts into the bottom dresser drawer among old belts, socks and pillowcases she hadn't had the heart to part with. She also kept the post cards and notes, terse, dull, dutiful notes from her children in the bottom drawer. She found more cheer in the scribbled pictures of her grandchildren than in those careless notes. She thought about throwing the notes away, weeding them out just as she weeded out the very old clothes she had earlier saved. If Erick had no clean good socks, a serviceable pair could be quickly secured from the bottom drawer. But Nancy had been trained, early in her marriage to Erick, to make certain he always had clean clothes; washing clothes twice a week was a welcome duty when the Chevy was running. She'd never had to go to the drawer. She noted that there was still plenty of unfilled space in the drawer, space enough for a sick bed on which she visualized her neglected marriage in the image of a Chevy upturned with its wheels sagging into the fenders.

The telephone jangled and Nancy slowly pushed the bottom drawer closed. As she stood she steadied herself on the edge of the dresser, and then made her way to the kitchen.

"Mrs. Pitzer?"

"Speaking," Nancy answered, her voice hard to discourage salesmanship.

"Mrs. Pitzer, I'm Erick's supervisor at the factory. I'm sorry to have to give you the news that your husband's met with an accident."

Nancy slumped momentarily against the yellow enameled door frame. She guessed by the supervisor's euphemistic words that the accident was serious. She drew in a deep breath that pushed her from the support of the door frame. The supervisor continued as if sensing the return of Nancy's strength.

"When I couldn't get you on the phone earlier today, I called your daughter, and she said she'd drop by and see if she could give you a lift to the hospital."

"How bad was the accident?" Nancy asked.

"Well we can't be sure yet. An ambulance came and the attendants used a stretcher to carry Mr. Pitzer, your husband, outta here," the supervisor explained evasively. After an empty pause, he continued. "A metal casting fell about twenty feet after a link in the transport chain snapped. It landed on his back as he was trying to dive out of the way. A freak accident."

"What hospital has he been taken to Mr. . . .?"

"Mr. Lonigan. They took him, Mr. Pitzer, over to St. Elizabeth's, but your daughter, I'm sure, will be around in about half an hour to give you a lift."

"Thank you, Mr. Lonigan, I thank you for calling."

"Sure, Mrs. Pitzer."

Nancy hung the receiver in its cradle, resting her hand on the sweaty plastic a full minute after Mr. Lonigan had heard the disconnecting click. It was one of life's dreaded coincidences that she had just that day been thinking about her life with Erick. If he were dead—the word choked the channel of her thoughts—if he were dead, she would be blameworthy. If he were dead, if she could possibly interpret her unvoiced grievances as wishes for his departure from her life, she was guilty. But if he were dead—other

thoughts wiggled their way through the channels, thankfully interrupted by a ring of the telephone whose receiver was still sweaty under her shaky palm.

"Yes," Nancy said anxiously.

"Mom?" It was her daughter.

"Yes, Tracy. Are you going to make it over here to pick me up?"

"Haven't you gotten a call from Mr. Logan, or whoever, yet?"

"Yes, I got a call from Mr. Lonigan. He said you'd be over pretty soon to take me to see your father in the hospital."

"I *knew* he'd get it wrong. I had to borrow Henry's car and he needs it back by four o'clock, and I knew you'd want to stay with Erick past then, and I couldn't go home and leave you there without a ride, and I told Mr. Logan that, but he seemed determined that I should pick you up, saying he didn't have anybody on his shift to spare to drive you over and all, even though I told him I'd try to find you a way then, but I'm sorry: I haven't."

"Are you at the hospital now, Tracy?"

"Yes. I saw Erick for a minute or two—that's all the longer they'd let me look at him before they shooed me out. He's in intensive care lying on his face, so I couldn't see how bad he looked. The doctor told me his neck had broken along with a couple of vertebra just below his neck."

Nancy knew broken vertebra usually meant paralysis, a debilitating condition for the victim and all his relatives. Broken vertebra meant Erick would be a vegetable, useless, helpless. She didn't want that to happen to him. More, she didn't want it to happen to her.

She fought off her selfishness.

"Mom? You still there?"

"Yes, I'll find a way over to the hospital, dear. Will you be there long?"

"Well, I have to get the car back to Henry by four and they're not going to let me see Erick anymore anyway, so I thought I'd go. You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course not."

"Give me a call later, will you?"

"I will," Nancy said, hanging up the telephone.

Her heart felt uncertain, her feelings ambivalent. She had once cared for Erick, but lately the care was custodial. He gave her little reason to care. He gave her little evidence that he still cared. This is a give and take world, she thought, and she gave more than she took.

But if he's a vegetable, she thought, I'm going to be the gardener, a lowly, nonrespectable occupation. She'd have to water him and irrigate him and prune him and give him his nutrients and never harvest him. He'd be a source of labor, and it will be labor nearly as fruitless as housecleaning. And he will sit in a wheelchair with nothing to do but speak, and he will speak nothing but evil. His criticisms will become more frequent, some about her, most about things he would never be able to change. And he will be home all day and she will watch him turn wrinkled and spotted and smell him turn rotten and putrid and still cling to his blood vine, spreading his death to the nearest life.

She cursed, clenching her fists, wanting to hit him for what she saw him doing to her. If he had only kept the love alive, she would be thinking only of his pain and anguish rather than her own. She swallowed away the lump of self-pity growing in her throat, but no voluntary act could seal her tears. They streamed down her reddened face, leaving glistening trails on her cheeks. She'd have to care for a vegetable, an over-ripe cucumber, she envisioned, with hard pithy seeds in its guts. She began to chuckle. A goddamn cabbage with nothing but a head and a root of a body to hold it upright. Her grotesque laughter spread throughout the house, saturating the walls with her pain. She pleaded with God.

"A good crop, God, is all I ask. Either a good crop, or a famine. Don't burden me with tilling an infertile field."

Fields alive with Erick's head and face, bending, twisting, agonizing, supported on stemmy necks sprouted in Nancy's mind. She shook the image and pulled on a white woolen sweater. The day had turned chilly, and the sun no longer shone into her living room. The house had taken on a grayish pallor that light from the lamp couldn't conquer. Sinking a knee into the soft couch cushions, Nancy looked out the living room window to see a car in the driveway next door. She'd finally found a reason to get next to Iris. It never seemed enough just wanting to talk with her. For Nancy it never seemed enough just talking with anyone. She had to have a more valid reason to be with someone, to intrude on someone. Prospects of marriage and love were reason enough to have been drawn to Erick, but with Iris she felt she had to borrow something or give some important information. When she was alive, Nancy's mother never went into the city just to window-shop or smell the smells of a bakery or see the city sights. She had to have a reason to go—she had to accomplish something on her trip, though

"He'd be a source of labor, and it will be labor nearly as fruitless as housecleaning."

whenever she went into the city, she nearly always got the business out of the way and spent the remainder of the day engrossed in its sights and sounds. But Nancy had never been able to enjoy the sights and sounds of people after she'd dispensed with her "reason" for seeking their company. Going further reminded her of oppression, the oppression of her mother's voice telling her to hush while others were talking. It had always been that way when her mother met someone in the city. Nancy would listen to the small talk and become bored with it. She'd want to play, but was restrained by a hand that didn't trust the busy streets. She'd want to talk about the toy store and her mother's voice remonstrated her. Nancy grew to hate the city and all her mother's reasons for going and all her reasons for dragging Nancy along. She used this hate to excuse her inability to make friends. She often said city people had little of interest to say and so she didn't want to hear them. And if city people acted friendly (and she gathered this idea from many books she'd read which depicted cities harshly) they either wanted something or were crazy or senile, like the old woman on the bus. But now she had a reason to unearth the sympathies of her neighbor, and Iris couldn't possibly be suspicious of her motives. She would think Nancy was distraught about Erick.

She hesitated at her neighbor's door. Again she was apprehensive about using a problem to gain entry into the life of her neighbor. She could just as easily have called a cab to take her to the hospital. But she was already there now. Iris had probably already seen her crossing the lawn. She pulled her sweater closer. She had forgotten to button the flaps together.

She'd never asked Iris for a favor before. Nancy had no idea how her neighbor would respond. Surely the circumstances would invoke her conscience. She wouldn't deny a fellow human in time of need. Nancy pressed the doorbell once and once more and then again in quick succession. She trusted that such ringing would instill a sense of urgency.

"Well hello," Iris said cheerfully. "I haven't seen you in a long time." Then she took a closer look at Nancy. "Why, you've been crying. What's wrong? Come in. Are you alright?"

"No, Iris. I need a ride to St. Elizabeth's Hospital. My husband's had an accident. Can you take me?"

"Of course I can. Let me get my keys and jacket," she said as she turned away.

Nancy stood on the lumpy welcome mat. The porch was fringed with potted plants, some hanging from hooks in the ceiling, some thriving in rectangular green boxes edging the concrete. The front door open, Nancy could see into the hallway of her neighbor's house. Brown curled leaves lay on the white, brown-speckled linoleum where they had fallen from the potted dwarf orange tree standing in a corner of the hallway. She saw her reflection in a wall mirror. She could see she'd been crying and hoped it looked like she'd been crying tears of grief. In the mirror she saw Iris hurrying from another hallway, jingling her keys and shouldering her pocketbook.

"Christ it's turned chilly out here. Will you be warm enough in that sweater?" Iris asked as she presented two jackets from the hall closet.

"Well," Nancy began.

"Here," Iris said, shoving the jacket at Nancy. "If it gets cold, you can wear it."

In the car Nancy felt she had to apologize for inconveniencing Iris, but Iris had retorted, "Nonsense." She felt she had to give Iris a reason for taking her to the hospital, but Iris had said, "You don't have to talk if it hurts." Nancy felt it hurt more that this woman was so accepting. She felt she was deceiving her some way. She wondered how Iris would have reacted to some of the secret hatreds she'd often thought of telling her.

Iris tried to be comforting, but Nancy was uncomfortable. She wasn't sure whether her discomfort stemmed from the horrid thoughts she had had when she got the news of Erick's accident, or from the controlled, unquestioning woman sitting beside her. Which was more unnatural? She wished Erick would be dead when she got to the hospital. She couldn't help it. He had long ago died in her heart and that part of her heart was wasted tissue. It didn't pump blood to her limbs and it couldn't remember the romance it had once experienced. It was like an awkward, useless organ. It had to be cleansed and rejuvenated. Love for something could repair it.

And she thought about the insurance policy on Erick. She had nearly thought of it earlier, when she had gotten the phone call from Mr. Lonigan, but had been interrupted by the second call. Now she thought about it without interruption. She would receive enough to pay the mortgage on the house, enough to get the Chevy out of its sick bed. The benefits from the factory would be generous for a few years until the company felt its guilt allayed. The promise of money staggered her and the possibilities of her future bewildered her. The impact combined to contort her face into something like shock, and the look suited her. She pulled down the passenger side sun visor and looked at herself in its mirror. Anyone who saw her would think she was feeling the loss of her husband. She wished he would die before she arrived. Her cry of independence from him and hospital bills would carry on her public facade.

Neither of the women spoke. Nancy took the opportunity to grapple silently with the morality of her thoughts, the uncertainty of her future, and the uneventful, loveless existence she'd spent with Erick. Iris drove steadily, silently, within her own thoughts. Nancy decided that no one was selfless enough not to think the thoughts she'd thought with the news of Erick's accident. With that firmly resolved, she wished she hadn't so quickly expiated herself; her mind was left free to think about her destination. Her eyes staring and unseeing began to twitch nervously and her hands in her lap kneaded the jacket Iris had given her. Legs rigidly straight and knees jutting above the seat

level, her hemline fell high on her thighs. The doctor would pronounce her reality.

She began to notice signs offering directions to the hospital. Their arrows set in backgrounds of sparkling blue paint guided her mind more than her body. She gazed on them as she passed, as the car, as if coaxed politely by them, turned left and again left in wordless obedience.

In the hospital parking lot she followed Iris. She noticed that many of the cars were shiny and new. Squeezing between cars, she caressed the sleek gray roof of a Mercedes Benz. Iris walked ahead of her in the narrow aisles formed by the parked cars. Her footing was sure and brisk. At the end of the final aisle, standing before the hospital doors she stopped and turned to observe Nancy's progress.

"I guess I'm hurrying," she said, waiting for Nancy to meet her. "You'd think I were the one with a hurt husband."

"I'm not sure I want to hurry. I don't know how hurt he is. The sooner I see the doctor, the sooner I may know the worst."

Iris squeezed Nancy's arm. Her eyes softened and Nancy felt like a hypocrite.

"I'm sorry. You must be feeling a lot of pain. I don't handle comforting pain very well. I hardly said a word the whole way over, but I was thinking of saying something. I was never sure it would be the right thing. I don't know how you feel."

"It's alright," Nancy consoled, "It would've probably been wasted on me—any thoughts, I mean. My mind was elsewhere."

The dull tones sounding from the hospital's PA system alerted Nancy to the sickness surrounding her. She had habituated the tone when she had spent hopeless hours in the hospital where her mother had died. She had then even habituated a defense against the sickness and death once signaled to awareness by the tones. Her mother had died and the tones had pounded through Nancy's defenses, reminding her that sickness and loss of hope continued.

The reception desk nurse had torn herself from a typewriter long enough to search for Erick's name in a file box.

"He's in intensive care. See Doctor Hobbs," she had said, turning back to her typewriter.

"No compassion, huh?" Iris had joked to Nancy.

Doctor Hobbs met them in the waiting room outside the intensive care ward.

"We've got some complications with severed nerves in your husband's neck, Mrs. Pitzer, but he's going to make it. The bad news is that your husband will never walk again. He's paralyzed from the neck down. He'll need extensive rehabilitative therapy even to use his vocal cords. And he'll have to be brought here every week for a year so we can monitor his progress."

Nancy just stood there stupidly, mourning her independence.

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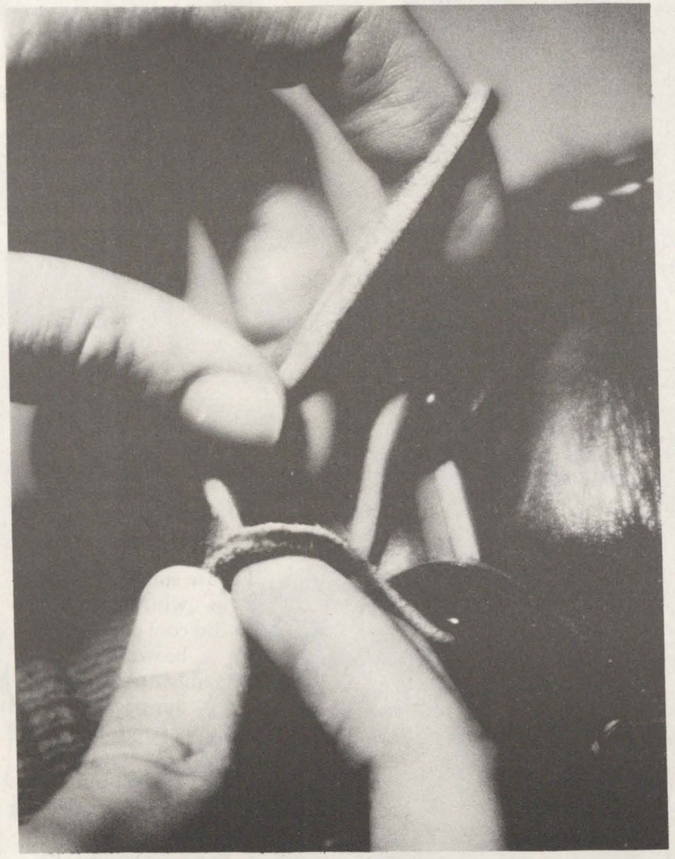

Deborah J. Fugett

Unsilent Night

Insanity surrounds
as fish pond silences grow
vaporizing their murky stench
to swallow me into the
shit brown depths
where I feed as a forsaken carp
on their chemical waste
of nuclear spew. . .

'63 Summer

I draw small circles
        with my toe
in the cool course flour
        brown earth
remembering my eighth year
        our back road summer
walking barefoot
        pressing my toe
        to hot bubbly tar
bursts with the pressure

        burns my skin

        and stains it

        sticky black.

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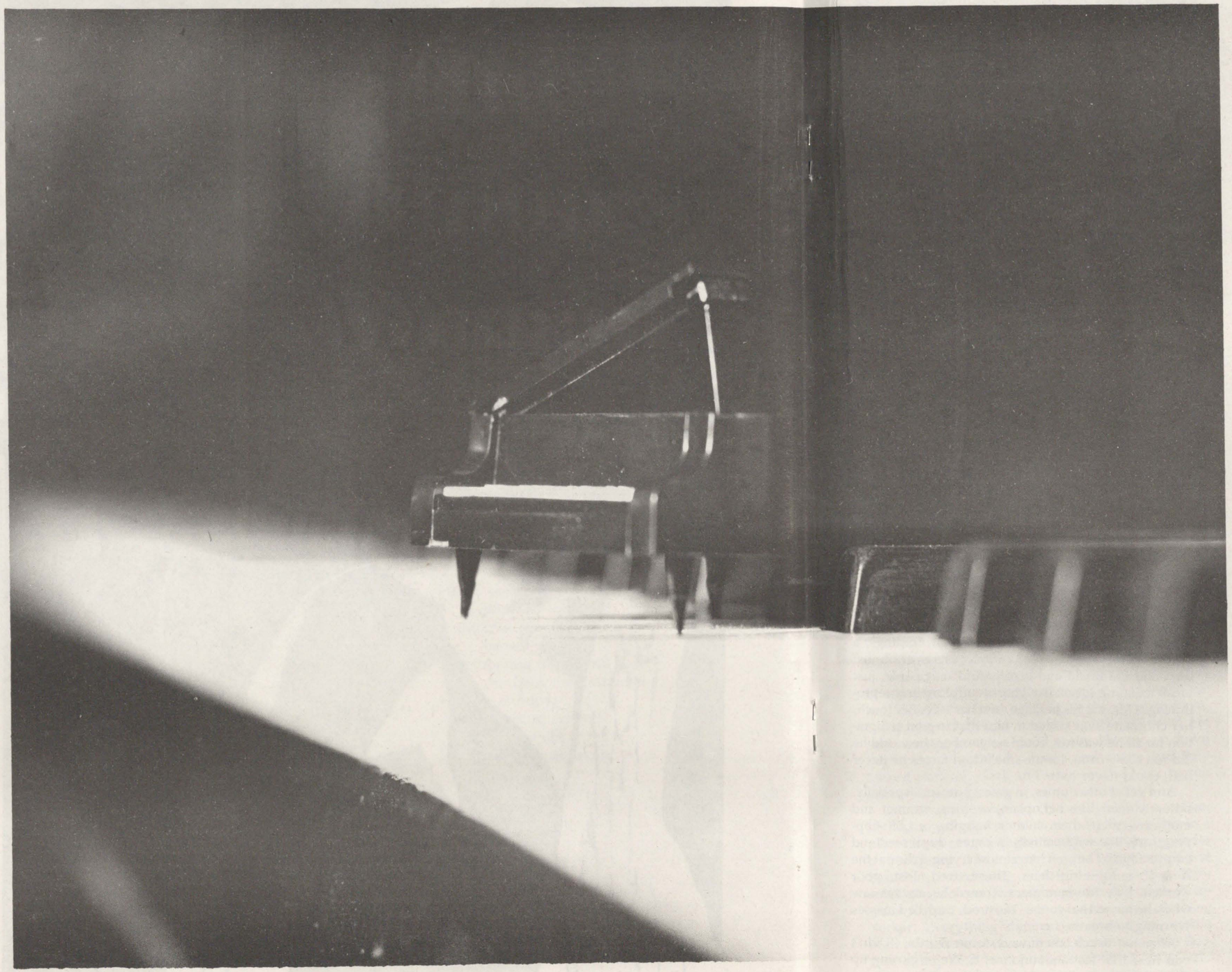


The Piano Woman

James Sollisch

Today Elliot Stern, Ph.D., neurotic-intellectual, committed liver of the life of the mind, woke up. But not like on other days. Today felt like a verb, the infinitive—*to day*—not the common dreary noun he usually awoke to. Today he heard trumpets and lutes; birds beat their chests, and squirrels screeched their mating calls from the rooftops. The mattress became a muscle, fleshed beneath the sheets: the dark woman he had been dreaming of, the piano woman,

ebony and sound. Pumping and tightening—groin without a mind, rhythm without meter—the mattress thrust him out of bed. He landed on his feet by the window. He rubbed his chest: the hair felt wiry and strong. He rubbed hard until it hurt. He ran his tongue over the white paste in his mouth: it tasted good, warm like yeast. Throwing back the drapes, he expected piercing sunlight; surely it was spring, the long winter's last cough gone, spring yawning. Yet dreary fall, November fall, filled his window view, the leaves like dead butterfly wings in piles.

Elliot Stern looked in the bathroom mirror, and for the first time in a long time, he did not see the growth to the left of his chin that he always suspected was cancerous. He saw the youth in his face, not the measured wrinkles he usually saw and was so proud of. Elliot Stern was not thirty-nine about to be forty or forty-nine about to be fifty like you'd think. This isn't a story about the remind-yourself-you're-still-attractive-and-vibrant syndrome of middle age. Elliot Stern was thirty-six. And thirty had come and gone uneventfully without a party, without friends reminiscing into glasses of white wine or beer, and without that dreadfully self-conscious look into the mirror that greets so many birthday mornings; for Elliot Stern, thirty had come and gone uneventfully like Chinese food, like the paper boy, like a bowel movement.

And Elliot Stern was not unhappy, had never taken the time to think about it; he saw the search for happiness as effeminate and self-indulgent. In the middle of the night, somewhere between sleeping and waking, somewhere in the dream of the piano woman, he had realized he was dying. Not a terrible realization, not panicky like you'd think; no, for Elliot Stern, Ph.D., it was a realization like waking up and finding that a favorite poet sang false songs, that the window of his words was a false window, a painted scene. He woke up—the chocolate eyes of the piano woman searching him, her smell like coconut like yeast under his covers, in his hair. He felt his groin tighten; suddenly he needed to eat with his hands and to smell the salt-fish-peach-ripe-rotting smell of life.

A dissonant chord, a rhyming out of place out of meter had jarred him last week. A shifting inside. A something not clear, not right. Her chocolate skin, shiny and dull, surface and substance. The way she ate those bananas like they were meat, a whole meal. The urgency, the way her mouth sucked and bit the pale, yellow flesh. And the black oily curls under her arms. She had moved something far back in him, behind his vocal chords; beneath his gut strings a wind stirred and made music there. The first music he'd heard there in a long time.

She had come to him late one night in the library. Come to him out of that cloud of books and words, images and syntax. His research had finally started moving, taking him new places—discoveries for no one, important for no one but the researcher. Totally absorbed, he hadn't heard the announcement that the library was closing. His books and notes, spread out on the table like a woman's makeup, covered him, hid him. Naked, excited, he crouched behind. She saw this nakedness for a second. Saw something beneath the scholar, something human and real. She stopped dusting and putting books away. She put down her half-eaten banana and walked towards him. Touching his shoulder gently, she startled him. He jumped, papers fluttering like confetti.

"He felt his groin tighten; suddenly he needed to eat with his hands and to smell the salt-fish-peach-ripe-rotting smell of life."

Her touch was soft and strong. To an outsider she would have looked calm and sure standing above him like a mother. To him she looked wild; he saw a wilderness in her. He saw the Old World, a lost Motherland. She was salt water and soil, rain forests and ripening fruit; she was music and rhythm and the groin tightening.

He looked at her and saw everything he was not. Yet he too saw himself as a product of an old world. The other old world. The Jewish eastern European old world of books and dust, of sand and buildings, a desert of faith and ideas. No rain forests or fruit, just dust and flat bread and books. And no people, just ideas touching ideas, like ghosts coupling and reproducing. This was his heritage, and her face, her touch, her chocolate skin stirred in him that urgent temptation for all he was not, could not be. For the world he did not come from, for the smells and tastes he never had, could never have.

And yet at other times, in grocery stores especially, other women like her, plain working women and mother-women, their children hanging out of shopping carts like wild animals in cages, depressed and emptied him. They left him almost crying in line at the A & P, eulogizing them. These tired, lost, poor women. Like the immigrant women he always saw when he heard the words: "the tired, huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

After her touch, there were some words: "Didn't you hear that last announcement? We're closing up now. I hate to make you leave—you look so serious about your work—but I have to make sure everyone's off this floor in five minutes." Her voice was so gentle, motherly, and yet he heard a seductive note hidden there too.

He found himself nodding, wondering about the looks he was giving her, feeling phony. Feeling that universal uneasiness the self-conscious always feel when confronting someone real. And worse: Elliot Stern was not only acting self-conscious, he was fully conscious of his self-consciousness and of its roots.

She said she was a student, talked about a few of her classes. But he couldn't really believe it, couldn't *actually* see her sitting in his classroom, studying the Nineteenth Century Romantics or even Conrad. She might be part of the heart of darkness, but she could never sit in his classroom and read it. He tended to judge people in this way: could they sit in his classroom and be taught by him, or would they be teachers to him? There was a large group of people who fit neither category, too real, too immediate. She was here. And unfortunately (it must be said) most blacks were here too. Elliot Stern was not a racist—at least never intellectually. In every sense he was liberal, compassionate, and socially conscious but with a liberal intellectual's habit of patronizing, of helping "little brother." He always had to remind himself after reading an excellent paper by a black student that the student really was black.

She sensed in him this surface like a thin layer of Saran Wrap but felt something deeper too—the thing inside the wrapper.

She sat down, showing him her legs: dark curls of hair like soft brillo pads under nylon. Two worlds again. Then she said, "The world moves in other ways too. It's not all in books." He said something that he can't remember, the kind of thing he would try to recall later and feel embarrassed. Something like, "Bad habit all these books. They're quite seductive, and I'm easily trapped I guess."

"Seductive? I don't know anything about that kind of seductive. Books really never did that much for me." She had to finish working, so she got up to leave. Softly, she touched his shoulder again and smiled. He saw her as through a cloud again. He looked down beginning to gather his books and notes, and they looked skeletal, black and white in the most barren sense—like negatives.

Later that night alone in his study drinking coffee, he had a waking dream. A memory he had lost in a place he never visits began to take shape like fog under a street lamp. The memory begins with a smell: that beautiful, intoxicating, suck-it-in-until-you-get-dizzy smell of gasoline. Then through the dizziness an interior forms: the front seat of his mother's old New Yorker. Everything shining new except the leather seats somehow always old and comfortable like Beatrice siting next to him. He is small—a three year old—nestling between his mother's rolling flesh covered with fine wool and scented with a pungent perfume that fights the gasoline smell and Beatrice's soft protective body covered with thin starched cotton and scented with ammonia-comet-lemon pledge

the smells of order (the smells that would form him and his life) on their way to the bus stop so Bea could catch her bus home home to a place he had never seen and wouldn't see until much later when he was seventeen and couldn't believe then or now (sitting in his study drinking coffee) that she could live there

live like that she who took care of him and smelled so clean and orderly she who had beautiful leathery hands worn and soft like the seats dry and starched with the sand of cleanser and looking up at her and then at his mother and sucking deeper until the gas smell tastes sweet in his mouth he sees the difference and says Bea's chocolate you chocolate and Mommy vanilla and they laughing and he nuzzling closer into the chocolate woman softer than his mother and the gas smell mingling with the starch stiff clean of Bea and the world ordered for him perfectly ordered maybe ordered for him only that once he thinks now in his study drinking coffee. . .

So the research went poorly for the next few days. He was filled with the wilderness he had felt in her that night, and it fought (just below the surface) all the veneers that made up his life: his order, his books, his research, the way he ate, his habit of cataloguing everything he saw. The wild fought the civilized and neither won; his life simply stopped like a tape player on pause.

Then today finally he awoke clear-headed: her rain forests had finally rained on his books; her coconut yeast smell had trampled his ammonia and cleanser. It had happened somewhere in that night: the piano woman—legs like ebony, teeth like ivory, a body full of voice and sound and rhythm had moved in. And Elliot Stern was forced to act.

He didn't cancel his classes; it was Friday so he might easily have. But he'd never missed a class, not in fourteen years of teaching. His morning class was studying D.H. Lawrence; but when he got out his dusty biographical notes and his folder on *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, somehow he couldn't even reread them. They seemed so dead, so moldy. So he went to class armed only with a book of Lawrence's poetry (the class was in the British novel—no poetry had been assigned). He told the class to just listen—no lectures, no analysis, no discussion. Just poetry and silence—Lawrence's voice. He read the poetry feverishly and religiously: the silences became almost prayer-like. And in the rhythm of those silences he heard a voice he hadn't heard in a long time.

His afternoon class was in American Romanticism. They were finishing *Walden*, and he was scheduled to introduce Whitman today. Instead he took them to a park across from campus. He told them to spread out, find a small area, a microcosm, and take notes. To understand Whitman and Thoreau, one must become an active observer, one must try to see small proc-

esses, single blades in fields of grass (he had never done this himself, but today it felt right). He spent his hour looking at a spider's web and began to understand things he hadn't thought of in years—the cruelty of nature, its hidden universes, its symmetry: Frost's "Design" became more than a poem to him for the first time, and when he repeated to himself under the sapling that held the spider's web, Whitman's words "I celebrate myself and sing myself and what I assume you shall assume, for every atom belonging to me as well belongs to you," he suddenly and clearly felt the dance in Whitman's voice, not the dance steps, but the dance itself.

He went at closing to the library to find her, to celebrate with her the dance he had felt in Whitman's voice, the rain he had tasted that morning, the tightening of his groin he had felt all day.

Everything was dark as he walked. A darkness he had never seen before. A darkness like those nights of youth when the secrets of flesh are first spilled. A darkness darker than black yet transparent, revealing. He thought about his transformation as he walked—about the darkness in it, the mystery. He had been reborn without light. There had been no spinning dazzling first light, no dawn or dew, no morning songs to sing in greening meadows, only darkness. The age-old darkness of the piano woman—her blackness a mystery, a voice without words. The spider's web was dark too, pinned against the bark-brown of the sapling, and the spider, the darkest of colors, a black beyond blackness turning almost to light, to blue-black, almost fluorescent.

He was going to find her, to pierce that darkness. To mesh with it, to bring his light into that mystery. And sadly for a moment he felt the futility in this, the familiarity of it. He had lived by bringing light into darkness. By making words, theories where only thing-ness had been. He was the Orderer of chaos. The Speaker, the Former. The Ancient Woodsman chopping trees, carving paths, building roads.

When he got to the third floor, he saw her entering a workroom, carrying books. She disappeared into the slit of the door, her darkness blending with shadow. He sat down and stared at the door, imagining himself in the room with her twisting and turning and tasting the salt-fish-peach-ripeness of her, seeing her round buttocks like peach halves close grinding into his face, between them the fuzzy pit, a darkness like a night flower opening, and here the vision stopped; he could see no further, and he could not see himself.

He is at the point where doors open or stay locked forever. He has only to act, to do something, to approach the door. He realizes he will do nothing. What he wants to do is to feel her mystery, her darkness, simply feel it, but he knows he would have to try to understand it, catalogue it, know it, speak about it. Order that chaos. Bring umbrellas into the rain forest.

He gets up to leave. The door opens. A shadow in a doorway of shadows. She motions. His mind like a camera snaps a frame: frozen, the infinitive—to motion, to want.

James Sollisch *teaches Basic Writing at the University of Akron. "The Piano Woman" is his second published story. He has also published articles of criticism.*

Night

The off on
    off on
lighthouse eye
of a toothgrind summer night
hating bright colors
        loud noises
Restless.
God is a goldbird
in a sleepsound dream
A white raven
aberration
Peaches and limes arranged
on a china plate.
In sanity
in the museum
this hour the gods walk
in parodies.
Dawn drinks the last
nightwater
and the daystar, drunk again
rises. Light
spins a clear cocoon
around each tear fallen
on a dog's fur.

Phyllis Kiernan

Bird of Prey

Ashes rise into gray dust.
I cannot separate
shades from shadows from visions
of violent green eyes
behind a black hourglass mask.
Paying homage to the songs
of a throaty silver instrument,
pinned to the apex
of a rusty brass heart
I dangle
and twirl—
kestrel on a tether
splintered wing limp
rain on my feathers.

Bug Poem

Fire breathing dragon fly
settles on sheer flesh.

Unseen tentacles tattoo
Chinese calligraphy

on a shudder;
blood turns to gravel.

I slap at the bold neoplasm.
My hand, useless

scissors hacking spindrift
misses. The monster,

angry and quick
as a neutron

arcs back with a buzz
deadly as belladonna.

I'm stunned

at the huff and roar
of its exhale.

Word Poem

Words that bound into the mind
gnaw through bone
like a great harlequin dane.
I will
my images, silver bullets
fired at pointblank range
to explode the brain
or even to brush a ragged nerve
and mimic the thunder
of a baby clapping lilac hands.

Phyllis Kiernan *is an English major at Wright State. She lives in Yellow Springs, Ohio.*

RICHARD FREEMAN

Once like snow within air there was no one
There, I was always there, was I in my
Mommy, I am a cat named Billigerlawn,
And she is the crescent moon. Become the tired
Sun as it sets below earth, rooted and black,
Serried like the brooded lord of trees, of
Tallies and tax, of shouldn't and should, of facts.
Once like a cloud I didn't see, I was
Small as a shell, and tucked like the sea
Inside, I was Mollybickert, I am
A cat. You are father my familiar,
Besaddler of dreams, my justice and schemes,
And I am Caitlin, kingdom from a hill drawn,
Swaggered and swell, pulled from the ground like dawn.

When I was three or five I bit them on the
Belly, and after it rained threw mud
In their face, sent them from the sidewalks with a shove—
Imaginary men would talk with me,
Saying 'This one's to kick and that one's to throw'—
When faces and fury tasted of plums,
And I hadn't learned fear from anyone;
I'd never need their kisses and never know
Their hugs, I ruled my street like a thug. A car
Could roll over and fill me full of blood,
But I'd never give love, I'd never give love;
My face could peel open from scratches or
Stones, but if ugly needs friends or a home
To be held; I was always alone.

Richard Freeman *lives in Yellow Springs, Ohio. He is a prolific writer of poetry and prose. He recently completed a one-thousand-plus-page novel. He's currently considering the creative possibilities of a mid-life crisis.*

A CITY FULL of RAIN

Gary Eberle

Lowell was not sleeping well. Not that he slept well as a rule, but this was more than his usual insomnia. Not every night was the night before his wedding. There was something uncomfortable entering through his skin as if he were one of those amphibians that breathes through its pores. He was lying on the Murphy bed he had folded down from the closet of the old apartment he lived in. He had tossed and turned on it all night. He inhaled its smells for the thousandth time, sour dank smells like the lingering odor of fish or urine.

The sounds of the hot night kept him awake. The noise of someone in the building across the alley flushing a toilet. A cat in heat beneath the window.

Now the moaning started in the next apartment. In the two years he had lived in the apartment, he had never heard it before. The Murphy bed's thick mattress, upright and unused in its niche, had acted as a sound barrier between his apartment and the old Jew's. But since he sold his single bed in preparation for the wedding, he'd been hearing the sound every night.

Now he tried putting a pillow over his ears, but in the intense heat of the night it quickly grew unbearable. It was worse than the moaning. Besides, with the pillow over his ears, he could hear his own heart beating and a persistent ringing in his ears that kept him awake.

He tried to lie on his side, on his back, on the other side. Nothing was comfortable. It seemed as though gravity was a little stronger than usual that night. Maybe it was the weight of the impending marriage, he thought. It surprised him to be thinking of marriage to Carol as a weight or a doom. He had never thought of it that way before. It was late for second thoughts.

Beneath the alley window, a cat yowled in heat, and its nearly human voice echoed through the dark passageway between the two buildings. The whole city seemed to coil restlessly, like the cat, its shoulders tight, its behind hunched squat, nervous, plagued with insomnia.

"Oooooooooooooooooo!"

The moans continued in the next apartment. They merged with the restless longing of the cat.

Lowell got up from bed and padded barefoot across the wooden floor to the window where he sat on the flat metal shelf that covered the squat radiator there. It was the dead of night, and he felt half dead himself, sitting by the window. He felt as if he were enclosed in a hot cloud of steam; his flesh was prickly with the heat and he felt a slimy, cool sweat beneath his pajamas. He looked out over the city and listened for noises.

Far off, tinkling glass, a broken bottle perhaps. Then nothing. Rolls of approaching thunder, increasingly loud, came from the northwest of the city, but in between there was nothing except the Jew's moans, muffled, from beyond the wall. He waited for the rain. It would come like a tide, cool and wet, and the first drops of it would spatter on the hot concrete of the city and disappear like the spit of a laundress on an iron. Till then, all he could do was wait.

He wondered, as he sat, whether the widow across the way paced nervously in her dark apartment, waiting for the rain, too. Like his neighbor and himself, she also seemed to have insomnia. On hot summer nights she often paced back and forth from one room to the other, dressed only in her panties and bra, trying to keep cool. She was careless about drawing her shades as Lowell's was the only apartment looking into hers.

She was an overweight woman, fiftyish, her flesh usually yellowed by the light of her lamp, her large yet empty breasts sagging against the cups of her bra. Sometimes it seemed to Lowell that her flesh was pulled down as though it had lost the will to resist the pull of the earth any longer. The woman did not prance around on her toes as a young girl might. She walked solidly through her apartment in the heat. She swayed like a cow, flat footed, from side to side.

He knew little about her or about the old Jew next door. He didn't even know if the widow was a widow. He merely assumed so because she lived alone.

The old Jew had a wife, Lowell knew that. But almost everyone had a wife at one time or another. He would have a wife himself in the morning. So what else did he know? A silver *mezusa* was nailed to the doorjamb of the Jews' apartment, and when the husband came home from the long solitary walks he took through the city, he would rub his thumb roughly over it, not so much to take a blessing, it seemed, as to mash it into the wood, to crush it the way you crush a garlic clove to release its odor. He was a large man. His wife was tiny, shriveled almost. The old man walked stiffly, as if wearing a back brace, and for a long time Lowell thought he was totally mute for he never opened his mouth when he passed him in the hallway or on the street. His eyes were vacant, staring, and the only sign of recognition he gave Lowell was a quick upward jerk of his right arm, as if it was connected to a cable.

As Lowell sat there listening to the old man moan, he realized that he had not invited any of these neighbors to his wedding. It had never even occurred to him. Yet there were many people coming whom he saw less often, uncles, aunts, distant cousins from the hometown he'd left years before. Why not invite neighbors as well? Was it only that he did not know their names? The city was only superficially anonymous that way, he realized. He did not know things like his neighbors' names, perhaps, but he had witnessed some of their most private moments. He had seen the widow when she must have thought she was absolutely alone, and he was also privy to his other neighbor's bad dreams. How many relatives did he know that well?

He listened again. There had been a brief pause in the moaning. The night was strangely calm otherwise, quieter than usual at this hour, with the sudden silence that often precedes a night storm as anyone yet awake tries to find shelter from it. There was no sound but the intermittent thunder. Then a siren, far off and unconnected; then the sound of an empty truck receding into the bottomless darkness of the city. The night seemed to have become corpselike, in some ways, waiting impatiently for resurrection with the storm.

The moans resumed, softly, and, with the

approaching mumble of thunder, they filled the night. The trees in the small park about a block away began to rustle in the premonitory way trees often do before rain.

Would the old Jew enjoy the wedding? Did he enjoy anything? His face was always expressionless, like a wall, the wailing wall, impassive. He constantly wore his *yarmulke*, and the tassles of his prayer shawl hung from beneath the hem of his black coat. His thick graying beard was suspended like a beehive from his jawline. But there was always the look of a drowned or dead man in his eyes, pale silver-blue eyes, without luster, almost like a blind man's eyes.

"The whole city was awake in the darkness."

The first night Lowell heard him moaning, he woke in a sweat. He knew immediately that they were not moans of pleasure, like the moans he'd often heard from the apartment above his. Those moans were accompanied by the rhythmic pounding of the headboard against the wall. The moans from the Jew's apartment were long, sustained, dirge-like even. Occasionally, the old man would punctuate the moans with speech. Lowell could not tell what language: Hebrew, Yiddish, perhaps Czech or Polish. There was no way to tell through the wall. It sounded impassioned, angry and pleading all at once. It was a voice that droned on and on, as if reciting a litany of some sort.

The next morning he saw the manager about it.

"Leave the man alone," the manager said.

"He moaned all night," Lowell said.

"So plug your ears."

"That's not what I meant," Lowell explained. "We should do something, shouldn't we?"

"Leave him alone," the manager repeated.

The rising storm started a can rolling down the alley. Rrrrrrrrrrrrr. A sound like nothing else. Empty tin on the prowl, spinning, turning, then rounding a corner somewhere, driven by a cross current, caught in an eddy or a swirl of wind formed by the building. The cat had long since gone, prowling in heat, perhaps now hiding from the coming storm beneath a dumpster, still yowling, still hoping to unite herself with some tomcat. Lowell imagined that the widow paced restlessly, too, awake in the dark, moving silently from room to room. The whole city was awake in the darkness.

Would Carol put up with his insomnia, he wondered. Would she nag, or would she feel compelled to sit up with him all night, to keep him company? That's the last thing an insomniac wants, he thought, company. Sitting all alone in the perfect silence of a sleeping city is the only reward of the affliction.

The second time he heard the moaning of the Jew, he felt again that he should do something, but he did not know what. Did the old man want company? Or did he, like Lowell himself, enjoy the loneliness of facing the night alone, wrestling with it singularly? Could anything be done even if he didn't enjoy it? Lowell and the old man shared no language. Should he go to the wife then? He had seen her only once, on her knees, wearing a pale yellow babushka tied around her head, washing the doorsill. He barely caught a glimpse of her before she slammed the door shut, frightened of him, of anyone.

Now the first cold gusts of wind swept noisily through the corners of the maze-like city and whistled through the alley. It whipped at the edges of his curtains like swatting hands. In the next room, the old Jew's moaning continued in apparent indifference to the storm. It droned on, rhythmically, liturgically, in a tongue that Lowell knew he could not understand any more than he could have understood the exact meaning of the cat's meowing. Only, as with the cat, he sensed in it a painful desire to unite with something or someone beyond itself. And yet, it was still more. It was more than desire for present union. The sound the old Jew was making was a uniquely human sound, one with the sad persistence of memory about it, memory that could not, after all, be shared.

Lowell had finally asked his friend Barry about the Jewish couple.

"Yes, I know them, or know of them," Barry said. He worked with the Jewish Social Services out of the local synagogue. "The usual thing," he said.

The usual thing, that phrase had filled several hours of Lowell's insomnia since. Both the man and his wife had their entire families wiped out in the war. Only the two of them survived. They had known one another slightly before the war. Then they had met again afterwards when they were brought to America by a relief agency.

"They live off us now," Barry said. "They can't manage any real work of any kind. We pay the rent, try to find counseling, and so on."

"Why does he moan like that?" Lowell asked.

"He was barely alive when the camp was liberated," Barry explained. "Broken vertebrae in the lower back, probably from a rifle butt. I think he had already counted himself among the dead. Maybe he's disappointed."

The usual thing. Lowell remembered Barry's phrase as the brunt of the thunderstorm finally bore down on the city. Water began to splash against the screens in long streaks, and Lowell had to close the windows quickly to keep out the wet. The water striking against the panes became like the sea beating against the closed portholes of a ship during a bad squall, and Lowell half expected the building to toss on the waves of water that swirled in the alley below. It seemed to come pouring down on them all at once, as if the clouds' swollen bellies had been slit with a great knife and their entrails showered down, splashing against the windowpanes, threatening to break them. As in the Book of Job, God was revealing his darker side in the storm.

Lowell could not help thinking about the future then. It suddenly seemed as frightening as the storm. In a few hours he would be married and gone, different from what he had been, yet the same. Marriage always ended badly, he thought, it was the usual thing. The death of one spouse, a bad divorce—one or the other was the inevitable end of it. Marriage could not end well. There was sadness accompanying it, always.

And? Beyond that normal disappointment? Was there still worse waiting for them? Could the Jew have foreseen the camps when he was Lowell's age? As a twenty-five-year-old man could he ever have imagined that he would end his life in a large American city, howling into the night from his reservoir of bad dreams? Had he considered the tremendous risk of it all?

As Lowell stood there, thinking of all this, there was a tremendous flash of lightning that made him jump. It was the long, lingering kind of lightning, chains of it, that seemed to form a web over the entire city, sweeping them all up like fish into a seine. After it, when the sky darkened again, there would be a tremendous thunderclap, but for the moment everything was silent, drawn up, suspended in the flickering blue light, breathless.

Then, as the thunder rolled, the city was plunged into the darkness of a power outage. All the lights of the city outside—streetlights, apartment lights, neon signs—went out, as if a giant hand, the hand of an angry irrational god, had swept across the city and turned off a switch.

Sheets of water pasted his window, and through them, in the flickering lightning, Lowell suddenly saw the widow across the way standing by her window. She must have come to witness the blacked out city herself. She stood there with her skin turned blue by the intense lightning flashes, with her palms flat against the windowpane, staring out on the darkened city. Perhaps she looked for the same things he did—for explanation, or confirmation, or just a sense that she was not alone.

Suddenly, the widow's eyes caught his. He was shocked by the sudden recognition, but stayed where he was. Instead of turning away, she merely stood there, looking at him. Then she lifted one hand from the window calmly and seemed to wave. Hello and good-bye mixed, he thought, and he waved back. Then, as when someone turns off the light in a room, the lightning above stopped and nothing remained of the scene except the dull image of the widow's gesture etched on his retina.

The thunder which had been withheld while the chains of lightning bound the night above the city was finally let loose and the windows shook.

By dawn, the storm had passed like a receding wave. From the apartment next to Lowell's came only muffled weeping and then silence. The widow came to her window again, not looking out this time. She drew the shade all the way down and Lowell only saw the flash of a white terry robe as she did so.

At dawn, Carol called. Her voice sounded different now, like a stranger's to him.

"More people?" she asked, a little shocked at his sudden request. Before that he had taken little interest in who came to the wedding.

"Not now," she insisted. "It's too late, you know that, darling. Absolutely not. The caterer would have a fit." Then she said, "I'm glad you're up though. Yes, the power was off here, too. That's why I called. Wasn't it a horrible storm? I've got to go now. Don't forget to brush your tux."

As the smell of percolating coffee filled the kitchen, Lowell opened the windows to let in some wet morning air from outside. By looking out at a sharp angle from the kitchen window, he was just able to take in a small corner of the park and a section of the street that ran by it. It was a view he had enjoyed every morning. Though it was after dawn now, the world that was revealed out there still had the dull blue color of the storm. It was the color of a drained pond, as though the buildings of the city had been exposed on a tide flat, flotsam left by the storm, waiting to be salvaged while still wet.

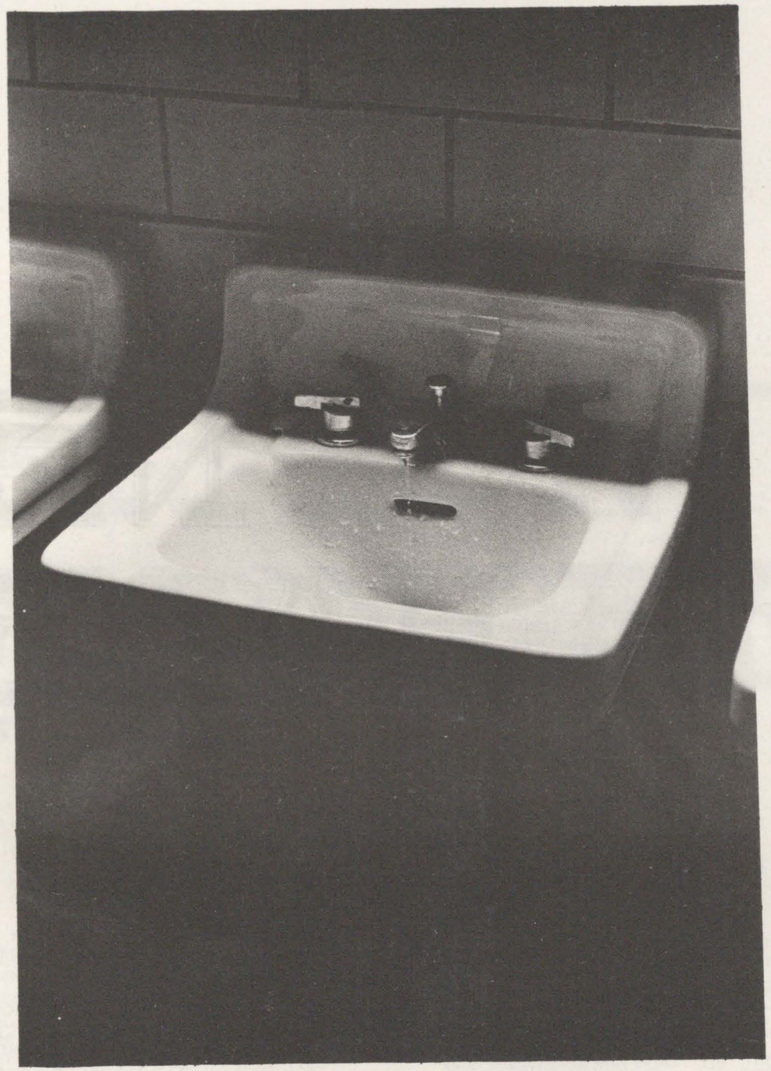
As he watched, a young couple rode their bicycles down the rainwashed street, and their tires went, "Sssssssssss."

Gary Eberle *teaches English at Aquinas College in Michigan and is a free-lance writer as well. He published his first book,* ***The Haunted Houses of Grand Rapids****, in 1981. His poetry has appeared in several literary magazines.*

Faucet

Sandra L. Carpenter

A fascinating faucet
a fixture of frustration,
for like some fervently
fumbling fast-talking fools,
the drips cannot be turned
off.



A NEW CAR FOR HARRY

by Rick Wagner

I

"This goddamn mess of a machine!" He swung the long-handled axe down onto the hood of the car. "Can't ever get the damn thing started anymore!" The axe struck again. A strip of chrome trim sprang loose from the windshield and quivered against the radio antenna. The crushing thud of creasing metal was smothered by the drifting snow.

"You fill 'em up, prime 'em up, and pump 'em up! Then, if you're lucky enough to get the son of a bitch started, it just won't goddamn stop!" The axe splintered through the windshield sending a flurry of glass shards up through the falling snow. He let the smooth hickory handle fall from his hands. It remained solidly impaled through the windshield as he walked several times around the 1957 Chevrolet. When he kicked the rear tire, chips of rusted metal fell from the wheelwell onto the snow.

"Look at you!" Harry spoke increasingly softer as he stopped, knee-deep in snow, and stared at the reflection of his face in the passenger-door window. "Ah hell, it's useless. You've served your purpose." The vapor from his breath feathered past his eyes and rolled across the brim of his hat as he stood calmly—comforted by immobility. Moments later he couldn't move. His hands were like iron wedges, causing him to slump forward. A thin thread of saliva driveled from his convulsing lips. His reflection, obscured by the pelting snowflakes, gradually dissolved into crystalline iridescence.

II

"Time to take your medicine, Mr. Hysinger," the nurse said as she opened the curtains.

"I want them closed."

"You can't lay around in the dark all day."

"Dark isn't the absence of light, just a lot less of it."

The nurse sighed and pulled the curtains open. He rolled over in his bed, away from the light.

"Besides, you're not being fair to Mr. Mattison." The nurse tried to take his wrist in her hand but he pulled away.

"Cal and me are getting along just fine, most of the time, huh Cal?"

"Mr. Mattison's asleep."

"He won't be for long with all the noise and light in here since you came in."

"You do need to get up and around. Some mild exercise—"

"I got lost just going to the bathroom."

"Maybe a walk down the hall. Could help reduce the chance of another stroke, Mr. Hysinger. Here, take your meds and I'll—"

He knocked the pills from her hand, rolled over and pulled the stiff, starchy sheet over his head. "Get the hell outta here." He could hear the nurse's footsteps squeaking across the hospital floor into the hallway. He heard Cal adjusting his bed.

"Better watch it there, Harry," Cal said. "I had a buddy, he never took no medicine or nothin' like you. Did just what you just did, so's they shipped 'im out to

pasture into one of them nursin' homes."

Harry sat up and adjusted the contour of his bed with the crank on the side.

"Maybe that's just what your friend wanted, Cal."

Harry turned on the television. He pressed the buttons on the bedside control as the channels changed methodically. Ka-chunk. Ka-chunk. Broken dialogue, bits of cacophonous music and frantic announcers gave him quick reassurance that the world could continue without him, if it had to.

"No man wants that, do you think?" Cal asked.

"Hm?" Ka-chunk. Ka-chunk, Ka-chunk. ". . . embarrassing itch and swelling of hemorrhoids. . ." "Get that, would you Cal! A goddamn hemorrhoid commercial! Dog food, thick soup, laundry soap for blood, and hemorrhoids! Jesus! Isn't there anything worthwhile to show us millions of people that don't have pains in our asses, or give a good goddamn about whites whiter than white?" Harry pushed the off button.

Call took his electric shaver out of the bedside table drawer.

"You use an electric shaver?" Harry brushed the back of his index finger across his whiskery face. Cal said that he did and turned the shaver on and began to stretch his face into a contorted grimace as he rubbed the grinding heads against his cheek.

"Don't you miss a good hot shave?" Harry asked.

"Hell no. I don't miss nothin' 'at makes you bleed."

"How're you healing, Cal?"

Cal turned off the shaver. "Doc Barnes says he'll hafta go in for more."

"More tumors?"

"Guess so."

"When?"

"Tomorrow."

"Good luck with that Cal."

"Hey, I worked all my life in the sewers of this stinkin' city. Keepin' 'em clean, patchin' 'em up so's the shit could fly. That's all he's gotta do. Ain't nothin' to it, really." Cal started shaving again.

"Shouldn't be this way, you know?" Harry stabbed the air with his forefinger.

"What's 'at?"

"A person should be born, then right away have heart attacks, cancer, strokes—you know, all those things. Then you should work your ass off and by the time you're thirty, retire in good health. Live until you don't want to anymore, then go get an injection and just fall asleep, forever."

"I'd go trout fishin' for a couple hundred years," Cal said, laughing as he shaved around his adam's apple.

Harry could feel the stream that flowed between his bed and Cal's. From Cal's side, the stream would be like liquid glass with all of Cal's favorite fish—schooled to catch again whenever memory permitted. Harry's stream was deep and brown, from the mud that slithered down the eroding banks into the swirling pools. Thick brush along the banks provided the privacy that he and Kathryn had cherished during those dreadful Sunday church picnics.

"We could get married by the judge in Effronsville. By the time anyone found out, it'd be too late."

"Harry Hysinger! That's unthinkable!" Kathryn said. "My mother would be so hurt, and my father, why he'd—"

"Don't worry. They'd accept it. They'd have to. Besides, what's the alternative? To tell them you're, you know, pregnant?"

"Heavens no!"

"Then?"

"Oh, Harry, I don't know."

"Look, tomorrow we'll go see the judge. In the afternoon," Harry said as he put his arm around her. The stream surged below them, carrying twigs, leaves, and an occasional empty bait container downstream. It languished and dissolved abruptly with the rolling of metal trays into the room.

"Just as I predicted, Cal. Nurses, noise, light, and now the rubber eggs."

III

"Dad? Can you hear me?"

"He should be able to recognize your voice. But you never know, Mr. Hysinger. Your father has had a series of minor strokes in the last week or so."

"Dad, it's me, Tom. Should I keep trying, nurse?"

"Maybe if we open the drapes, get a change of atmosphere. It is a little dark and stuffy in here."

Harry recognized his son's voice. He tried to respond, but his voice wouldn't make a sound; just silent, internal screamings that were trapped deeply in his chest. His eyes were closed. He wanted them open but felt drugged to the point of being totally motionless. "Tommy, how's my boy?" he kept muttering in some distant corner of his brain. A hand touched his shoulder—warm, soft, Kathryn dancing with him, smiling up at him.

"Is he going to make it?"

"The doctor should be here in a few minutes. He will be glad to answer your questions then, Mr. Hysinger."

"Son?" Good old Cal made it, Harry thought. "He don't much have a desire to live. I don't know why. He's a good man."

"The best," Tommy said.

"Kathryn your mother?"

"Yes."

"She passed on?"

"Three years now."

"He calls for her a lot."

Harry could see Kathryn's rosette smile and the ruby earrings tucked teasingly behind the soft curls that brushed her cheeks.

"I hope Harry pulls through, son."

"So do I."

IV

Harry honked the horn of the new 1957 Chevrolet as he drove by the Anderson's house.

"Oh Harry, stop!" Kathryn's face was flushed with embarrassment.

"Do it again, Dad. Beep it by Davey's house, would you?" Tommy asked.

"You bet, which one is it?"

"Right there, Dad. That one right there. Yeh! Beep it, Dad!"

Harry honked the horn several times as Kathryn slumped in her seat.

"Honestly, Harry. You two are just a couple of hooligans!" she said.

"Smell that smell, Tommy?" Harry took a deep breath through his nose. "Can you really smell it?"

Tommy closed his eyes and inhaled deeply.

"That's new seats, carpet on the floor, and a padded ceiling! A padded ceiling, Tommy!" He brushed his hand against it. "I've waited a lot of years for this. A lot of years, haven't we Kathryn?"

"Slow down, Harry! You're going to wreck us on our first trip around the block!" She put her hand on Harry's knee.

"Hey, Scott! Our new car!" Tommy yelled from the rolled-down rear window at a young boy who started pedaling his bicycle quickly in a vain attempt to keep up with them. When he lapsed far behind, Scott took off his baseball cap and waved it in the air, whooping and hollering.

Harry smiled at Kathryn. He could see her profile reflected in the clean, polished passenger window. The warm afternoon sun cast flickering shadows upon the padded copper-colored dashboard, as the Hysingers drove their new car down Ellington Street.

Rick Wagner *is a Wright State English graduate student who, along with his wife Diana Bergman, also a WSU student, has released two original folk songs albums:* **Seasons in Us All** *in 1979 and* **Where'd the Whistle Go** *in 1982.*

Poetry Review: **Blue Oboe**

by Kate Hauck

All poetry has this in common: it seeks the emotions. It searches out memories, visions and emotions from the poet and from the person reading the poem so that the two share the utterance of a feeling. A poet turns down the sound to listen inside of himself. If he can first find, then translate pure feeling into words in a poem which, when seen or heard, translate back to the reader pure feeling, then he has written a good poem. But for the reader to experience the emotions that a poem can elicit from him, he must also quiet and listen and look inward. In a sense, as willing and creative a response is required of the reader as of the poet. A poem can name the most intimate parts of a person—the unspoken losses, lusts, terrors, joys, dreams. It gives a voice to that which is vague and hidden in each of us, and in the utterance the poet and the reader of the poem are drawn together.

David Garrison is a poet whose book of poetry, **Blue Oboe**, is soon to be published. He is also a person who believes that poetry is a good way to cope with feelings; he writes because he is interested in playing with language and dealing with emotional responses.

Garrison's poems contain a keenly observed neutrality. They are free from moral comment, conveying and eliciting an emotional response with rich images. These images are portraits, miniatures and masterpieces, hanging framed and well-lit. Garrison, the artist, doesn't stand at their side suggesting we feel one way or the other. He hasn't interpreted his images—he has brought them forth and then left them.

Goodbye, Mr. Clark

He corrected exams on his wedding night,
sat toward the middle of his car seat
so the tires would wear evenly,
saved thousands of orange juice cans.
Those were the rumors.

Tall, salt and pepper whiskers,
forty years a French Teacher.
He smiled as if he didn't understand
the joke but wanted to be pleasant.
The children would answer him
in whispers until he leaned forward
and turned up his hearing aid,
then someone shouted so loud
he reared back in pain.
When the children would no longer
sit still for Latin and Greek roots,
a mandatory retirement age was invented
just for Mr. Clark. He muttered, refused
to sign and pass the memos.
On warm afternoons he would shuffle
out to the baseball diamond
and stand behind the backstop,
stretching his arms wide as he could
to clap when our team scored a run.
On the last day of school his students
piled chairs to the ceiling that fell
on him when he opened his classroom door.

Because he simply observes without judgement, we as readers are permitted our own translation into pure feeling. Garrison maintains his personal emotions while respecting ours. This restraint is an integral part of each of the poems in **Blue Oboe**, and it signals a maturity as a poet: the maturity to allow the poem to speak for itself.

The poems are sparse and clean, another element of restraint. His poetry is accessible because of it. We understand the language as our common language. Its precision permits us to focus, and when we can focus, we begin to share the common expression of emotion between the poet and the reader.

Desire

There is a piece of
coal deep inside me that wants
to be a diamond.

His poems traverse time and space freely, bringing past and future into the present moment. Garrison does this with craft and grace. His poems move in and out of time effortlessly, calling the past into the present. He aligns memory with gentle humor. Because of this the poems have a celebratory quality. They praise life, even after a keen look and a wry laugh.

Birthday

In high school the coach reminded us
the other team's players put their pants on
one leg at a time.
This morning, newly arrived at age 34,
I stumbled getting into the first leg,
fell on the bed and realized
why I never made the starting team.
All day I kept falling giddy
into memories, finding myself
in squeaking doors, a favorite pen,
dog-eared maps, and rain.
I heard a songbird somewhere
in the rippling layered dome of a tree
and walked three times around it
looking for my past.

The rhythm and shape of the words reach beyond the images in Garrison's poetry. His poetry not only paints, it sings. It flows and moves; its rhythms lead and follow, all at once. His pleasure in the sound and shape of the one word, the connection of words into the line, the combination of lines into the whole poem is an invitation to an inner motion within us.

Garrison's poetry has a delightful tension. It is solidly set on a foundation of restraint, yet within this restraint

there is a rich range of imagery, humor, poignancy, rhythm and sound. We are not trounced upon, neither are we ignored. Garrison's poems invite participation into the inner self; they call without commanding. This gentle hand is easy to follow into the vagueness of feeling. Once there, we are able to find our own emotional expression in the sound and shape of his: to look closely, to find neutral ground, to laugh, and finally, to align our past selves and our future selves into the present.

To the Shore

On hot days we pedaled our bikes down
the melting asphalt road over that steep
hill of blackberry bushes and scotch broom

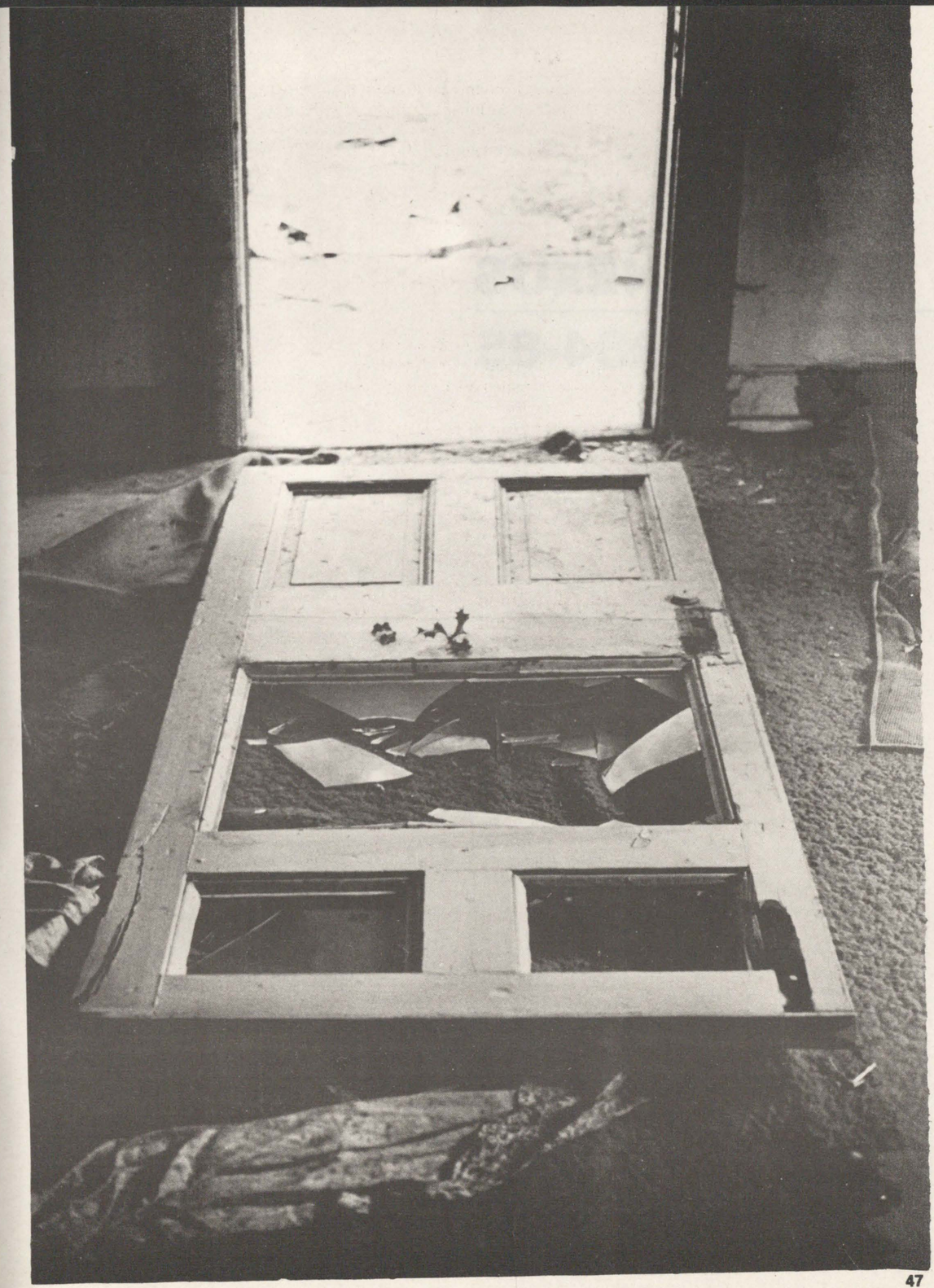
right into the cold foam of the bay.
Then we gathered smooth flat stones
and skipped them. A good one, polished

by a million or a billion years of sea
and sand, would hop ten times before
it sank. I walked down that hill

to the beach one night years later
and cried for the passing of my life.
Amid the dark patience of rock and water

I watched waves sweep stones to the shore
and suck them back in deep salty breaths.

David Garrison *is an Associate Professor of Spanish at Wright State. His poetry has been published in numerous "little" and literary magazines. His first book,* **Blue Oboe**, *a collection of original poems, is scheduled for publication by Foundations Press in January, 1985.*



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